

Socialist review

Issue 36

For a democratic and socialist alternative

October 2011

National DISASTER

HARD Labour



Green WASH

VOTE LEFT

VOTE MANA

OCCUPY
Everywhere

Election 2011
Political Guide

Capitalism
Not Sustainable

WHERE WE STAND

Socialism

Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need. Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over its production or distribution. A new society can only be built when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and create a new state in which they will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.

Workers' Power

Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want. Liberation can be won only through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power - a new kind of state based on democratically elected workers' councils. China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have nothing to do with socialism. They are repressive state capitalist regimes. We support the struggles of workers against every ruling class.

Revolution Not Reformism

Despite the claims of the Labour Party and trade union leaders, the structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against workers. There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

Internationalism

Workers in every country are exploited by capitalism, so the struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We oppose everything that divides workers of different countries. We oppose all immigration controls. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation struggles.

Liberation From Oppression

We fight for democratic rights. We are opposed to the oppression of women, Maori, Pacific Islanders, Asians, gays and lesbians. These forms of oppression are used to divide the working class. We support the right of all oppressed groups to organise

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for their own defence. All these forms of liberation are essential to socialism and impossible without it.

Environmentalism

Exploitation of nature is as central to capitalism as exploitation of labour. Capitalism everywhere came into being by privatising the commons. Private property means privatisation of profits and socialisation of costs, like pollution. Socialisation of costs and profits is needed for environmental planning. Only the working class can achieve this.

Tino Rangatiratanga

We support the struggle for tino rangatiratanga. Maori capitalists and politicians have no interest in achieving tino rangatiratanga for working class Maori. The Government and corporate warriors' approach to Treaty claims has benefited a Maori elite while doing little for working class Maori. Tino rangatiratanga cannot be achieved within capitalism. It will only become a reality with the establishment of a workers' state and socialist society.

Revolutionary Organisation

To achieve socialism, the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by day-to-day activity in the mass organisations of the working class. We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests. We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions. We are beginning to build such a party, linking the ideas of revolutionary socialism to workers' struggles against the system. If you agree with our ideas and want to fight for socialism, we urge you to join us.

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REVIVING THE RIGHT TO STRIKE

SEX AND CLASS IN THE 17TH CENTURY



A s Socialist Review goes to press, we've seen dramatic developments emerge that expose both the worst of the system we live under, and an inspiring example of the kind of resistance it prompts.

The worst is the unfolding ecological disaster in the Bay of Plenty. Following the Rena's running aground in mid-October, hundreds of birds have been killed, beaches are covered in oil, containers have been smashed open, their contents flotsam along the shore. Local people are now facing what many officials are calling New Zealand's worst ecological catastrophe.

In the days following the grounding, scores of ordinary people went to the beach to try and help in a clean-up operation. They were told to leave it to the experts, but anger is mounting at delays, government ineptitude, poor communication, and a National Party that seems unconcerned about the legitimate distress this tragedy is causing.

Jobs are put at risk; people's sense of well-being is threatened; the environment is being destroyed before our eyes. And yet John Key, in the week after the grounding, could talk dismissively about not having a "magic wand." Ngai Te Rangi, Ngati Awa, Ngati Rangitihi, Whakatohea and Te Whanau a Apanui all have whenua and kaimoana put in grave danger as the oil spreads.

The results of the Rena's grounding may be a natural disaster, but their causes are social, and political. As Joe Fleetwood from the Maritime Union argues: "responsibility for the Rena disaster lies with Government and authorities." The seas have been given the neo-liberal treatment as much as our jobs on land, and loose practices, cost-cutting, "open seas" and other "flexible" measures led to a decline in safety standards and contributed to this catastrophe. What's worse, National and the Maori Party, happy to hand out tax cuts to the rich, have been cutting costs in essential safety equipment. In 2010 the Maritime Union approached the government to lobby for a ready response vessel for the maritime sector. They were brushed off. If

the concerns of unionised workers – a group with the interests of safety and the sea, not profits, as their goals – had been listened to then the response to these oil leaks could have been much quicker.

And yet what did National spend this year promoting? Off-shore oil drilling, even after Deepwater Horizon. Under capitalism, the planet is always under threat.

If the Rena disaster shows capitalism's chaos and destructiveness, a new movement emerging in the United States offers us a view of the kind of force that can win real change.

The Occupy Wall Street movement was just taking off as we put this issue together – it should inspire activists and campaigners the world over. Indeed, as we go to press, solidarity occupations are planned in NZ, Australia, and the UK.

OWS is significant because it represents a grassroots revolt, one free of the dead hand of the Democratic Party. Frustrated by high unemployment and corporate greed, occupiers are drawing organised labour into visible and lively protests that name their enemy: the capitalist system. With the US economy in serious trouble, youth unemployment at shamefully high rates, and no end in sight to the war in Afghanistan, this movement is especially important because it encourages self-activity. Where, for a while, it looked like the initiative was going to the Right – and the ultra-reactionary Tea Party – while Obama betrayed the hopes his supporters had placed in his pro-business administration, OWS changes all that. It sets a new tone in US politics, just like Seattle in 1999.

The scale of the protests has meant that the mainstream media, who, in the US as in NZ, usually ignore or mock political activity outside the "respectable" channels, have had to give extensive coverage to OWS. Even senior establishment figures are trying to defuse the movement's energy by feigning sympathy with it. Obama organised a massive bi-partisan bailout for the banks in 2008, but now he's in sympathy with the protests, telling one interviewer that "People are frustrated, and the protesters are giving voice to a more broad-based frustration about how our financial system works." Even the Federal Reserve chair is trying to paint himself as neutral: "They blame, with some justification,

the problems in the financial sector for getting us into this mess, and they're dissatisfied with the policy response here in Washington. And at some level, I can't blame them." The hypocrisy is staggering.

That it's attracting these kinds of false friends, though, is a sign that the movement is growing and that established, pro-capitalist forces want to keep it in check. Another way they do this is by asking why the movement has no demands, as if the only demands that matter are those that can be reduced to the trivial (and almost indistinguishable) policy differences of neo-liberal politicians. But it's the scale of the OWS demands that are inspiring millions of working people around the world: the protests are attacking the logic of the system itself, its obscene imbalances, wild corporate greed, its inability to provide decent health care in a country as wealthy as the US. These kinds of issues go way beyond what's acceptable and open for debate in 'moderate' US political circles, and they expose the bankruptcy of those circles.

The whole world really is watching: will the movement spread? It's too soon to tell, but the ISO will be involved all it can in building campaigns that stress workers' need for self-activity, self-reliance, and political clarity. The NZ political situation isn't as polarised as the US – far from it – but, with National planning a second term of vicious cuts, privatisation, and assaults on beneficiaries and the poor, we won't always be that far behind.

2011 will go down as one of those great years of struggle like 1968. The year started with the Arab Spring and the defeat of Egypt's hated dictator Mubarak. Greece has been rocked by mass strike after mass strike. There was rioting and youth revolt in England. A huge anti-nuclear movement has emerged in Japan. And now OWS brings new life to the US workers' movement.

The waves of this struggle haven't reached New Zealand's shores yet, but they will. And we need to be ready.

Through the election and beyond, we'll be posting regular articles from the US and elsewhere on political struggles around the world.

Now, more than ever, we need socialist ideas, and activism. This magazine tries to contribute to that process.

Dougal McNeill

Student protests are back



About 300 students turned out to protest when National Prime Minister John Key opened the Bill Robertson Library at Otago Polytechnic in August.

The demo was organised by the university students association executive, which is against an ACT/National bill that would make membership of student associations voluntary.

The justification for the bill is that it would give more freedom to individuals to choose whether they wanted to belong to OUSA or not. Key told the Otago Daily Times that "From a tertiary perspective, this is the only sector in New Zealand's economy, at the moment, where unionism, for the most part, is compulsory. We want to put the education sector on the same footing as the rest of the country."

OUSA members (80% of whom prefer

universal membership according to a referendum) are concerned that voluntary student membership (VSM) would gut the union of members and funding as many first-year students, already hit by high fees, course costs and rents (all of which are compulsory), would cut anything non-compulsory from their start-up costs.

Advocates of student unions argue that while this might make short term sense, student associations offer a vast array of services and resources, including radio, magazines, health and support services, which have been built up over decades. Most importantly, student associations

give students a collective voice and memory.

Fees and rents have been steadily rising over the last three decades as the cost of education is increasingly forced onto individual students.

This is an open part of the neoliberal economic theory that has been applied all over the world with disastrous results.

An inescapable part of neoliberalism is breaking down the collective organisations that allow people to organise local communities and economies where the "free market" is in some sense held at bay.

The very existence of subsidised student gyms and radio stations is a permanent outrage, a constant thorn in the side of free market ideologues.

But the free market of neo-liberal theory is an entirely abstract beast, a chimera that never has existed and never will.

In the real world there are enormous discrepancies of power between the decision-making elites and ordinary people. Just as in the days of the Roman Empire, their slogan is "Divide and Rule", while ours is "Unity is strength".

Its precisely the existence of a student union that has allowed space for diversity on campus and consistently fought for the rights of all people, New Zealanders and international students, working class, middle class or ultrarich, to have the right to an education.

The message of the protest yesterday was simple: students back their union; and the mood was cheerful and upbeat. Student protests are back.

Andrew Tait

Can PSA become a fighting union?

These two facts warrant taking an interest in how the union fares.

The PSA has a bad reputation on the Left. It is true that the "partnership" approach is written into the rules of the union. It is also true that the union has an enormous paid staff, a veritable bureaucracy absorbing the lion's share of members' subscription income. Despite these drawbacks I would argue that there is no reason why the PSA cannot become a fighting union using militant tactics.

The notion that the PSA, or any union for that matter, is inherently a rightwing union is false. The real barometer of a union is the ability of the membership to act. As it happens, last year Ministry of Justice PSA members took action and reached settlement. I do not say the settlement was wonderful or the action particularly militant. The point is that MOJ members showed their capacity to have a national stoppage. The same potential is there in all sectors of the union.

An important current struggle involving the PSA and the Service and Food Workers Union is the sleepover case. Disability and mental health workers have won their case in the Employment Court and the Court of Appeal for the minimum wage to apply to sleepover shifts. The employers were set to go to the

Supreme Court. In June the unions rejected the Government's miserly offer to settle the case. The two main issues are when the minimum wage is introduced and back pay. The offer was to stagger introduction over 4 years and cap back pay at \$45m or 25% of the back pay owing.

A revised Government offer in September upped the backpay to 50% and the payment of the minimum wage by the end of 2012. The SFWU say that 98% of 1700 disability support and community mental health workers have voted to accept the revised Government offer. The settlement concerns IDEA Services and should pave the way for other sleepover workers. The PSA says it is celebrating a victory.

These workers do a fantastic job in caring for the vulnerable. Yet under the twisted logic of the market they have been treated abominably. After a years long campaign this mealy-mouthed settlement is something of a breakthrough.

The PSA is producing some hard hitting posters as part of its election campaign on the theme of Stop the Cuts. One poster shows a graph that demonstrates that New Zealand's public debt ratio is one of the lowest in the world. The campaign gives the lie that the country cannot afford our public services.

Martin Gregory

The Public Services Association (PSA) is the largest union in the country. It is in the firing line of public spending cutbacks having an impact on jobs and pay.



Night shift workers get pay rise

Unite union members at McDonalds have been in contract negotiations since March. The company made some concessions on working conditions but only offered a 2% pay rise. Union members in the Dunedin franchise rejected the offer - especially as night shift workers at McDonalds-owned stores (as opposed to franchises) - get an extra \$1 an hour. After a bit of to and fro, local franchisee Paul Steiner offered an extra 50c p/hr - giving Dunedin Unite members the best deal of any franchise. This victory shows its worth holding out for more, but if we caan get this much from just rejecting the offer, we could gain a lot more from a nationwide strike.



200 people rallied in Aotea Square as part of a day of action against the Copyright Amendment Act.

For the first hour people chilled out in black, drinking coffee, listening to pirated music, and heard speakers against the law - John Minto from the Mana Movement, Gareth Hughes from the Greens and a speaker from the Pirate Party.

Socialist Aotearoa brought the tunes and dozens of placards reading "Pirates vs. Empires. Same shit. Different century."

At 1pm SA led the crowd into the street to chants of "When internet freedom is under attack, stand up fight back", the march moved down Queen Street and took over the intersection between ASB and Civic Square. With Dead Prez blasting over the SA sound system, hundreds engaged in an impromptu sit down occupation.

Chants of "Fuck John Key" echoed in the warm late winter air. A tino rangatiratanga flag waved above the mob.

As the police cars sirens screamed towards the protest, the black clad youths dispersed into the street, back into the everyday, to continue the resistance.

On September 1 the Copyright Amendment Act comes into law. There is always a underground way of avoiding and fighting this law, but SA is committed to fighting the anti-file sharing law out in the open.

If we don't the government will continue to pass new laws that make it harder to share music, books and movies for free.

Socialist Aotearoa

Join the Struggle

Socialist Review is a magazine produced by the International Socialist Organisation Aotearoa. It aims to provide quality political analysis that represents the interests of the working class majority in New Zealand. But unlike "alternative" media sources, we don't aim simply to provide an "antidote" to the corporate lies, imperialist wars, oppression and inequality that dominate the global landscape; we aim to put them into historical and economic context, to draw links between the various issues and the global capitalist system, and analyse what they mean for ordinary working people and the working class movement, both at home and abroad. To do this we try and maintain a healthy balance of domestic and international issues.

We also practice what we preach, and support the working class movement whenever we can, with the long-term aim of building an organisation that can provide the working class with political leadership in times of upheaval. If you're interested in our politics and want to know how you can get involved, please phone or text 027 606 9549 or email: contact@iso.org.nz or visit our website: www.iso.org.nz

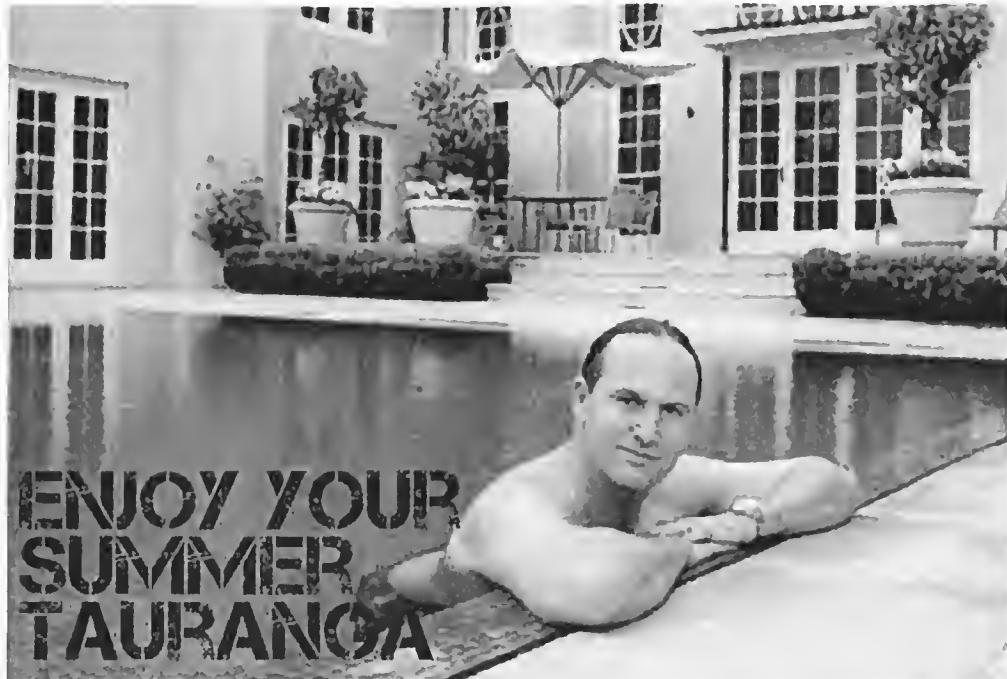
Why is John Key so popular?

Most on the left, myself included, have been surprised by the popularity of the Key Government. Even though the polls probably overstate the actual level of popular support for the Government, there can be no doubt that this is the most popular National Government in New Zealand's political history.

All of the main polls suggest that National is supported by over 50% of potential voters (around 56-57% support in the most recent polls commissioned by TV1 and TV3, while Labour languishes on 26-27%, with the Greens doing quite well with 9-10% support). This suggests that National will easily win the election, and may be able to rule without needing the support of a coalition partner. Labour is facing a crushing defeat.

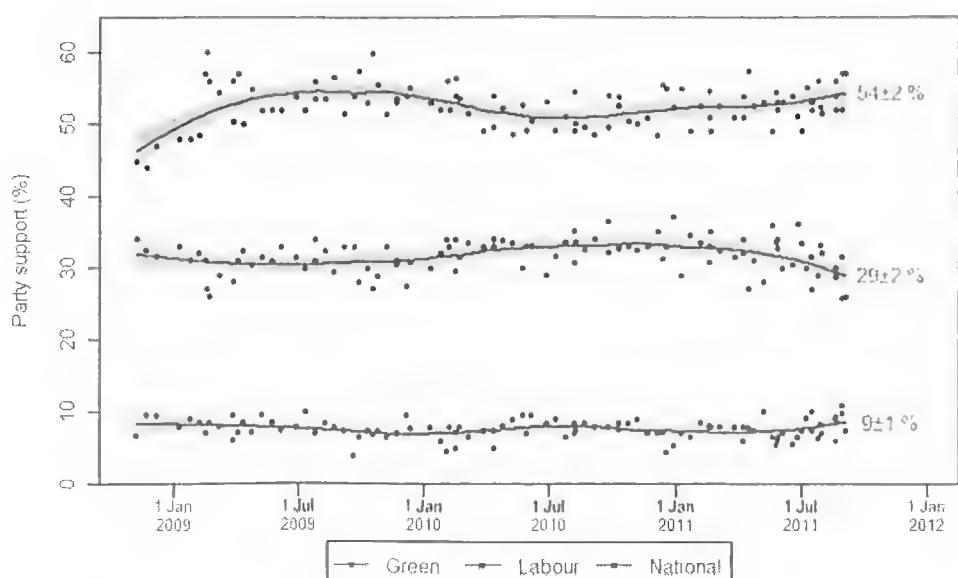
Most people are worse off

What makes the popularity of the Key Government so remarkable is the fact that by every objective measure the majority of people are in a worse position now than they were when the Government was elected in November of 2008. Real incomes for over 70% of New Zealanders have fallen in real terms, that is, taking inflation into account. While the Government has cut taxes for the rich (top income tax rate down from 38% to 33%, company tax down to 28%), it has increased the taxes paid by low and middle earners. It has pushed through cuts to Working for Families, taken away employment rights for workers for



What makes the popularity of the Key Government so remarkable is the fact that by every objective measure the majority of people are in a worse position now than they were when the Government was elected in November of 2008. Real incomes have fallen, while taxes have been cut for the rich.

National, Labour and Green Party support in the major polls



the first 90 days they spend in a new job, made it harder to get a welfare benefit, made cuts to Kiwi Saver, and has cut employer ACC levies while increasing those paid by workers and road users. 154,000 people are now officially unemployed, and a staggering 251,000 are jobless.

As if this wasn't bad enough, the economy is in a mess, as are the Government's finances. Economic growth remains close to zero. Even though world prices for our exports are currently high, New Zealand's balance of payments with the rest of the world is negative 3% of GDP (total economic output), because of the interest payments that have to be made on \$168 billion of private offshore debt (90% of GDP). No wonder that international credit rating agencies have just given New Zealand a downgrade.

Despite claiming to be much better than Labour at managing the economy, this Government has run the biggest budget deficits in NZ's history, and borrowed massively. The resulting debt will soon become an excuse to cut welfare and other areas of social spending.

Media bias and political spin

So why, in view of this, is this Government so popular? There are some obvious reasons. The corporate media is generally biased towards the parties of the right rather than the left. Take, for example, the credit rating downgrades by Standard and Poors and Fitch. If this had happened when Labour was in office then the media, National, Act and all of NZ's major business groups would have presented it as being a national disaster of epic proportions. But because National is the government it's presented as a small bump on the road.

The Key Government has been given an easy ride by the media in other respects as well. For example, the 2010 tax package only benefitted a small wealthy minority, while the GST increase impacted negatively on low and middle income earners. But no challenging questions were asked. As a student of mine pointed out, even

ELECTION: VOTE LEFT!

though political journalists in New Zealand appear to be in love with the guy, surprisingly little detail is actually provided on those areas of Key's life that would undermine his popularity, such as his elite business background and at times shady business dealings and political manoeuvrings.

Key and his Government is clearly very media savvy, with serious money being invested in continuous political polling, and behind the scenes 'spin doctors' using this research to do a very effective job of selling this Government to voters as a moderate government doing a good job in difficult circumstances.

Probably reflecting the results of their own polling, the Government has carefully avoided major attacks on education, health and superannuation. This has helped it to maintain its popularity.

The pathetic performance of the Labour Opposition has also helped. To its credit, Labour has opposed some of National's worst policies, but Goff and crew have been generally ineffective in getting their message across, let alone helping to build the kind of mass movement outside parliament that is required to defeat this Government.

Victor Billot, the Alliance candidate for Dunedin North, argues that Key is popular "because he provides an aspirational image – rich, relaxed, in control – which becomes more attractive as everyone else becomes poor, stressed and not in control. He is perceived as 'non political', more of a celebrity or perhaps successful and popular manager. To most people a credit downgrade sounds perhaps a bad thing, but what does it actually mean? Whereas 'JK' chatting to fellow success stories on a radio show provides a reassuring, warm feeling that all is right with the world."

Low level of working class struggle

This may well be true, but it overlooks the most important reason why the Key Government is so popular. The main reason is the low level of working class struggle and progressive social movement struggle, as the strike activity graph shows. We haven't seen tens of thousands of workers taking strike action to defend their employment rights, wages, and conditions of employment, let alone striking to oppose what this Government is doing. This kind of thing is happening in Greece but it is not happening here. There have been some important student protests against VSM, but nothing on the scale of the mass protests and occupations of 1990s. Likewise we have not seen the kind of mobilisations by Maori that were common during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Since 2004 anti-war protests have been small scale.

All of this means that Key can waltz around the country looking like a popular President of Godzone. The absence of mass strikes and protests creates a political space in which the Government's spin doctoring can work.

National's popularity won't last

There is little doubt that National will romp in at the election BUT within twelve months of the election National will be polling much lower. The policies that it has lined up will not be popular because they will make the majority

ACT Party: the rot sets in

Dancing with the Stars was a laugh, Garret was a sick joke, Hilary Calvert a comic interlude and Brash promises more entertainment.

To watch the ACT party - once the mouthpiece of the ruling class, showered with money and praise by the elite, feted by the media lapdogs as the voice of economic reason, a party blessed with every advantage except policies palatable to ordinary people - to watch this party fall apart under the weight of its own contradictions is a rare pleasure.

We revolutionary socialists fully acknowledge that we are marginal to the mainstream of politics. But we are tiny organisations without business backing and without upper-class professional members and supporters. We can't buy advertising or engage spin doctors. We can't pull any strings or rely on the professional networks that Labour, National, and ACT can.

The ACT Party, by contrast, had every advantage in resources in their financial, professional and social capital that could be

lavished on them. Despite all of these advantages, the ACT Party is a state of decay. Why is this?

The basic reason is that they are selling poison and even the best sales team will struggle with that. The 2008 global financial crisis rung the death knell for the ideology (call it neo-liberalism, monetarism, or the free market, whatever you will) that dominated politics for 30 years. This theory has failed to do anything except massively enrich the rich. A deeper question is why on earth do we even have an ACT party.

ACT is unique because it is a product of the Labour movement. In the UK and the US, these policies were pursued by Tories, here by Labour.

The wholehearted embrace by the supposed representatives of the working class of the policies of the ruling class is the reason for the existence of a party of big business, even though big business is too tiny a section of the population to electorally support such a party. The disorientation that resulted from this betrayal allowed, for two decades, a party to survive that based itself purely on policies in the interest of the 1% to 5% of the population that run big business.

worse off while only benefitting a small wealthy minority. The pro-business orientation of the Government will become much more apparent when it starts to launch more serious attacks on the welfare state and workers' rights.

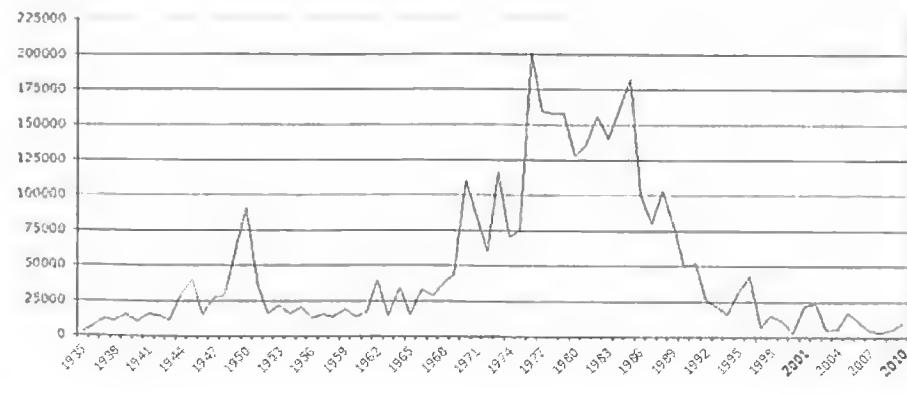
Key has stated that "We are of course acutely conscious that New Zealand's wealth is ultimately generated by the private sector – by the small firms, the big companies, and the sole traders who generate the jobs, the profits, and the return on investment that drives our economy". In a similar vein, Bill English claims that the Government aims "to create a more business-friendly environment in New Zealand". This means that they will try to push more and more

of the costs of the economic and financial crisis on to low and middle-income earners, while defending the power and privileges of the wealthy.

John Key is not a 'nice guy' – he is a nasty, power hungry, rich guy ruling for the rich. As the crisis gets worse, as the Government's policies start to reduce the material standard of living of the working class majority of New Zealanders, as the distraction of the Rugby World Cup fades into the background, the resistance of workers, students, and the oppressed will grow and the popularity of this Government will rapidly decline.

Brian Roper

Figure 1
Number of Workers Involved in Strike Action, 1935 to 2010



Is Labour moving left?

It seems like a paradox: Labour is adopting a whole series of policies that are, in themselves, very popular – a \$15/hr minimum wage, GST off fresh fruit and vegetables, a capital gains tax, no asset sales – and yet, at the same time, the party's own popularity is at record lows. What's going on? Is Labour moving left?

For starters, the fact Labour has adopted the \$15 p/h demand shows the importance of organising outside Parliament: if it hadn't been for Unite union's tireless campaigning around this issue before it was 'acceptable', it would never have become a mainstream issue.

But Labour's adoption of these policies demonstrates the contradiction of reformism. On the one hand, there's a cynical – and useful – explanation for the party's shift to the left: they're in opposition. Now they don't have to take responsibility for managing capitalism, Labour can make gestures to win back the loyalty

of workers and the poor. At the same time, though, they need to let the capitalists know they're still a 'responsible' party ready to rule in the interests of business. So, David Cunliffe announced in October a "bipartisan consensus" over public service "fiscal austerity". This as hundreds of public service workers face job losses!

This contradiction is at the heart of reformism. Labour is a pro-capitalist party just like National, but it's a party of a very different kind. Its appeal to the ruling class is precisely that it can harness the hopes – and illusions – of workers in a way National never can. So many Labour leaders are ex-union bureaucrats (think of Darien Fenton or Andrew Little), and large unions like the EPMU are affiliated to Labour. This doesn't make Labour a "lesser evil" than National – the 1980s showed us that – but it means they need to operate differently. They need, at some level, to

articulate the desires of workers with a basic class-consciousness: their safest seats are in working-class areas, and they can contain the unions more efficiently than National.

Labour's history in government – especially in the 1980s – shows how politically bankrupt it is, but history alone won't convince people who are faced with cuts and attacks now. Labour responds to a basic class consciousness ("for the many", as Labour's slogan has it), but also expresses a weakness: a hope that professional politicians will win our struggles for us. Only a new wave of workers' and student struggle, with strikes and protests that win real change through direct action will free us from the dead hand of Labour.

But in the meantime, understanding the massive rip-off of working people in NZ that has taken place in since the 1980s is a good start.

Dougal McNeill

1984: pro-business blitzkrieg

To understand the fourth Labour government's great betrayal of the New Zealander working class, we need not look far outside our everyday lives, writes Johnny Fersterer-Gawith.

This year my university fees exceed \$4000, in direct comparison with my parents' \$125 in the 1970s-80s. Meanwhile, my cell phone bill of \$10 a month pays for a pitiful 1000 text messages. What do these seemingly unrelated costs have in common you may ask? Both are the direct manifestation of an orgy of privatization and deregulation brought about by the supposed representatives of the working class, the Labour Party.

In 1984 the Labour Party, the party that brought in the welfare state in 1935, smashed the foundations of the system it and its working class members had fought so hard for. Labour's new neoliberal doctrine prescribed financial deregulation, privatization of state assets and budget cuts, which resulted in mass unemployment, undermined unions, and caused massive growth in the gap between the rich and the poor.

To understand the betrayal it is worth examining the economic theory that preceded neoliberalism.

The welfare state and state intervention in the economy in New Zealand originated in the 1930s when the first Labour government was elected in a reaction to the world wide Great Depression.

These policies can be described as Keynesian even though economist John Maynard Keynes did not publish his main work until 1936. He argued that because so-called "free markets"



caused stagnation, unemployment and inequality it was necessary for the state to intervene to reduce the boom-bust cycle and maintain full employment and social security. Labour's Social Securities Act of 1938 increased pensions, and introduced a national health service. By 1940 New Zealand was ahead of any other English-speaking country in terms of social security and healthcare.

These reforms were also adopted by National governments in the post-war period. These included a minimum wage and an ambitious programme of public works including roads, railways and hydro-electricity plants. Following the Second World War, a period of long-term economic prosperity known as the "long boom" ensured that both the Labour and National parties adopted a policy of "steady as she goes" with regards to economics. In 1950, just twelve people were on the unemployment roll!

The short term success of the Keynesian welfare state created the illusion that a

parliamentary party could control the economy and redistribute wealth, but the welfare state was still part of a world capitalist economy. The boom-bust cycle was not eliminated and in the 1970s, it struck back with vengeance, with oil crises precipitating a global recession. To make matters worse for New Zealand, Britain entered the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 and New Zealand lost its main export market. The balance of payments deficit grew to 15% of GDP by the mid 70s, along with growing public sector debt, a high inflation rate and a sharp rise in unemployment.

In 1975, a National Party government under Rob Muldoon tried to keep the economy stable with subsidies and borrowing. Muldoon's "Think Big" policies (large-scale projects aimed at making New Zealand self-sufficient in energy) emerged as a result of the oil crisis of the 1970s. But public works projects like the Clyde Dam and the development of gas and oil deposits only deepened the debt crisis. Inflation and unemployment continued to rise - from less than 3000 registered unemployed in 1975, to 21,000 by 1980.

It was into this turbulent mix that the Fourth Labour Government came to power in 1984 under the leadership of David Lange. Finance Minister Roger Douglas, began implementing his "Rogernomics" policies at breakneck speed. The goal of these policies was to deregulate the economy to allow complete freedom for market forces. Douglas deregulated financial markets, removed exchange-rate controls, floated the NZ dollar, and abolished price and interest rate controls. Trade barriers and agricultural subsidies were reduced and a general sales tax (GST) was introduced. The GST and user pays shifted the tax burden away from the wealthy to working people. The main thrust drive though was a massive privatization of \$10 billion worth of state assets including NZ Steel, Telecom and the national rail network. Economist Brian Easton

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describes these economic reforms as a "blitzkrieg".

The central idea of neo-liberalism is that if inflation is low, and taxes on the rich are reduced, a trickle-down effect will ensure money from the upper class will be reinvested into jobs. Also, if protectionism and intervention was removed, markets would be more competitive and efficient.

Labour reduced taxation for the wealthiest from 66% to 48% then 33%. To counter the tax reduction, a 10% tax on goods and services (GST) was introduced as well as user pays in all areas of the public service. Import tariffs were cut from 65% to 25%, which drove up unemployment as the NZ labour market was put into direct competition with low-wage economies overseas.

Attacks on workers' legal rights followed like night follows day. The Business Round Table, in a classic example of ruling class warfare saw organised labour as a barrier to "efficiency" and international "competitiveness".

Union strength was sapped on the shopfloor by high unemployment and the union leadership was blindsided by Labour's right turn. Workers were left unprepared for attacks from aggressive employers. During wage bargaining in 1986 and 1987, employers started to bargain harder. Lockouts became more common. Later settlements drew further concessions from unions, including below-inflation wage increases.

The opening of the New Zealand economy to foreign investment and restructuring of the state-driven economy saw massive attacks on the working class of New Zealand with 76,000 jobs lost between 1987-1992. Between 1986 and 1993, the unemployment rate rose from 3.6% to 11%.

Rural towns ravaged

Meanwhile, agricultural subsidies were removed - hitting the rural economy hard. Sheep, meat and wool prices fell dramatically as government-guaranteed prices were abolished. Farmland prices had been falling in real terms since 1982. In 1985 they were 30% lower than the peak of 50 to 65%, and were even lower by the time they bottomed out in 1987. It is estimated that over the period 1985-89, around 5% of commercial farmers were declared bankrupt or simply left farms. Labour's attack on the agriculture sector resulted in a concentration of wealth as smaller farms were swallowed by larger, and coupled with cuts in public services, especially the closure of rural post offices, this resulted in the gutting of many rural towns.

Labour's revolution from the right was enabled by supposedly left-wing policy in other areas.

Left face

In NZ the 1970s and early 80s were the heyday of student and worker protests - against racism in South Africa and NZ, against sexism and against the US war in Vietnam. When

Labour was elected, most people thought positive changes would result - and they seemed to. The Waitangi Tribunal's powers were increased and Te Reo Māori was made an official language. A Ministry of Women's Affairs was established in 1986 and New Zealand was declared a nuclear-free zone. These were welcomed by many New Zealanders who saw them, rightly, as the achievements of the mass protest movements of the 70s, but superficial liberalism disguised the economic class war of Labour's neoliberalism.

After Labour's loss in the 1990 election, the emerging National Government completed the job of the neoliberal attacks on workers' rights. The Employment Contracts Act of 1991, seriously reduced the power of unions and effectively smashed the power of collective wage bargaining.

As a consequence, major losses in pay and conditions occurred in the workforce. An example of this was prior to the ECA, 720,000 workers had protection under awards or collective agreements. By 1996, these had dropped to 350,000. Also the unemployment benefit was cut in 1992 by 25% for young people, 20% for sickness beneficiaries and 17% for solo parents.

The consequences of the neoliberal agenda can be most clearly in the rise in real wages vs productivity. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that productivity had grown by a staggering 83% between 1982 and 2006, but real wages have declined 25%. To conclude, Labour's betrayal of

the working class of New Zealand, through the implementation of neoliberal policies of the 1980s has lead to widespread inequality, and misdistribution of wealth.

As a result of the "success" of neo-liberalism, with regards to the working class, income inequality increased substantially from 1982 to 2004. In 2009, the top 10% of the population received 25.7% of total disposable household income (but held over 50% of net household wealth) and the top 20% received 40.4%, while the bottom 50% of the population received 28.5%.

A legacy of failure

The two most common statistical measures of income inequality - the Gini coefficient and the P80/P20 ratio - demonstrate income inequality was substantially higher in 2009 than 1982. Child poverty increased from 1982 to 1993, fell from 1994 to 2007, but levelled out from 2007, settling at around the rate that prevailed in the early 1980s. Taking housing costs into account, 25% of children lived in relative poverty in 2009. Using this same measure, 18% of the population lived in low-income households in 2009 compared with 9% in 1984. In 2004, New Zealand was the eighth most unequal out of 30 OECD (developed) countries.

Despite all this pain, neoliberalism did not lead to efficiency gains. From 1984-1993 inflation averaged 9% per year, New Zealand's credit rating dropped twice, and foreign debt, in spite of asset sales, quadrupled. In a period where the average OECD economy grew by 28.2%, NZ's economic growth was a mere 4.7%. Not only are working people poorer, market madness has undermined the whole economy.

JJ Fersterer-Gawith

Student protesters occupy office

By John Gibb

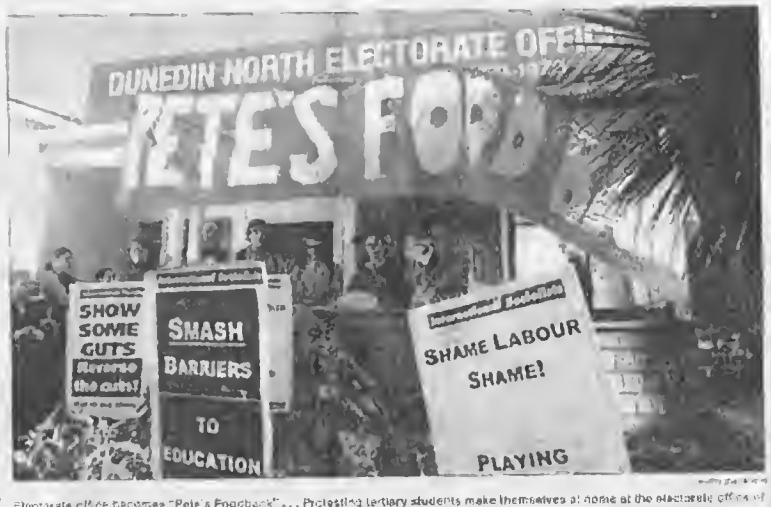
About 50 Dunedin tertiary students briefly occupied the electorate office of Dunedin North MP Pete Hodgson yesterday, in protest against tertiary funding issues.

Students from a group called Universities of the People, started the protest, and joined by other students from the City Polytechnic and Otago University College, took over the office in the hope that ministerial ministerialists would be forced to respond to their demands.

Students from the university, who are also Science Ministers, and heads over real estate companies, politicians and so forth, were not present during the protest, but the protesters did manage to get the ministerialists to leave the office for a few minutes.

Students used the office for interviews, to make political protest, to demand a press conference, to meet with the ministerialists, and to demand a meeting with the ministerialists.

Students used the office for interviews, to make political protest, to demand a press conference, to meet with the ministerialists, and to demand a meeting with the ministerialists.



Dunedin North Electorate Office "Pete's for". Protester tertiary students make themselves at home at the electorate office of Dunedin North MP Pete Hodgson yesterday.

In 1989 students paid a mere \$129 to attend university each year. In 1990, shortly before the general election, then Education Minister Phil Goff (yes, the very same Phil Goff who is now leader of the Labour Party) introduced a flat tuition fee of \$1250 for all students. The opposition education spokesperson at the time, Lockwood Smith told students he would abolish the flat rate, even promising to resign if this levy wasn't removed. Smith, true to his word, did abolish the flat rate - by replacing it with something far worse. In 1991, the Education Act was amended to allow Universities to set their own fees at whatever rate they chose. Whilst Smith didn't strictly lie, he led students to believe that he would make the tertiary system more equitable instead of basing it on free market principles that were a detriment to students everywhere.

The Greens: Beyond left and right?

Since the end of the nuclear standoff of the Cold War, environmental destruction has emerged as the most serious threat to human society. It's no surprise that the green movement has emerged as a dynamic political currents. But how true is the Greens claim to be beyond left and right?

If you put the emergence of the Green movement into the context of the post-war world, which was divided into two power blocs – the USA (the right) and the USSR (the left) threatening each other and the whole world with total nuclear destruction, it is unsurprising on the face of it that the Greens would see themselves as beyond left and right.

But there is more to the story. Many Green Party leaders started as students in revolutionary left movements that rejected both Washington and Moscow – including in NZ Russel Norman, Sue Bradford and Keith Locke. In the 1960s and early 70s, there was a huge upturn in working class struggle. Every progressive movement – whether against racism, sexism or environmental destruction – aligned itself not with the USSR but with the struggle against inequality and oppression.

But this moment did not last. From the mid-70s onwards so-called “free market” theories became dominant and the working class suffered a series of defeats. New areas of the world and the world’s workforce were opened to western capitalism, which started to outsource production to the “newly industrialising countries”. The most famous example is the Rust Belt in the USA.

Myth of de-industrialisation

It is in this period of defeat that Green Parties have grown. Labour was disoriented as their traditional blue-collar support base was eroded and their Keynesian (state interventionist) economic theories discredited. The Greens adopted ideas from the new right – that metal-bashing jobs were being replaced and we were moving into a post-industrial, even post-capitalist economy, where the old workers versus bosses divide did not apply. Greens were able to step into the space vacated by the left – in NZ, the Green Party vote has been sustained by the collapse of the Alliance. They are polling at 10% at the moment, compared to the Alliance’s highest election support of 18%.

But although there has been a relative decline in manufacturing in the West (for example the recent sackings at Kiwirail in NZ), on a global scale, the industrial working class is larger than ever. Although the Industrial Revolution may be ancient news in Europe, an industrial revolution is under way in China that dwarfs the European revolution. What’s more, this shift is not decisive. Manufacturing still generates nearly half of NZ’s exports and Goodman Fielder recently announced the relocation of its French and Australian food processing operations to NZ.

The logic of reformism

Because of this analysis, although the Greens are well to the left of National (and Labour) on working class issues, they do not see the working class itself as a force for change. Rather, defending workers is a responsibility of the State, as is defending giant carnivorous land snails in Happy Valley. Business owners (and farmers), because they control property are seen as direct agents in the Green scheme of things. Workers are a source of votes not direct action.

There is a logic to this approach that pushes parties away from their roots and toward dependence on the state and elites – it is the logic of reformism.

As political commentator Bryce Edwards writes: “As the party has aged and changed its leadership it has become particularly keen to leave behind its principle-oriented way of doing politics, shift towards the centre of the political spectrum, and be seen as moderate and respectable rather than radical or purist. This development can be seen very clearly in the party leadership’s latest triumph of pragmatism over principle – the decision to support the draconian Canterbury Earthquake Response & Recovery Act (CERRA) in Parliament. By voting for this landmark legislation, the Green MPs have incurred the wrath of the party’s more principled members and supporters.”

On the other hand, the party has been praised from the right for their new realism over this and other matters, and the majority support of Green Party voters for a National coalition in a recent 3news poll suggests they may be losing some activists but they have the support of their voters.

Russel Norman said the party voted for the quake laws because it would have been seen as insensitive in a period of national mourning otherwise. The same realism applies to foreign wars. When Keith Locke MP praised the NZ troops in Afghanistan and mourned the killing of an officer, he is signalling his support for more than just that war, but for nationalism in general. There are no similar statements of mourning when workers are killed on the job, which happens far more regularly than soldiers or police.

This is just one example of many – generally it is true that although the Greens oppose US-led wars faraway, they support the use of military force in “our” neighbourhood – Bougainville, Solomons, Tonga, Fiji (well, maybe not Fiji, their military is too strong). This week Gareth Hughes called for the Navy to be deployed to help stop Japanese whaling in the Arctic Ocean. This can only ratchet up international tensions in a world where resource wars represent a real danger. If Japanese whaling is a problem, then the Japanese

The working class goes global

Far from being out-of-date, working class politics are more relevant than ever, as industrialisation – and unions – spread into the ‘newly industrialising’ countries. In India, where full-time jobs are a rare exception, 100 million workers came out on general strike on September 7 this year. At the same time, China is experiencing its largest-ever wave of industrial action. Spain just had its largest ever strike, involving 10 million workers (about 70% of the workforce). So did Portugal. In fact a surprising number of countries have had their largest-ever strikes in the past few years, including the USA, UK, China, South Africa, Greece, Nigeria, Tunisia, Spain, Egypt, Colombia, Libya, Turkey, Bangladesh, Madagascar, Portugal, Nepal and Cambodia. According to newunionism.net, it seems that two thirds of the largest strikes in history have occurred in the last 10 years.



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people are the ones with the power and responsibility to find a solution. Environmentalists can only appeal to them, not push them into backing their own ruling class.

Contradictions

It's fairly simple really. We are faced with an urgent problem and we have to choose certain strategies or tools to fix it. If we put to one side religious solutions, we have to look to see what forces are available in society. The Greens, because of the urgency of the problem, argue that we should put aside our differences and work together, in the existing political and economic reality.

But the political reality is competing nation states with long histories of war and standing armies in a world of dwindling resources. Accepting, as the Greens do, the existence of nation states (which are recent and artificial creations in most of the world) is a recipe for resource wars.

The economic reality is a competitive capitalist system. Each farmer strives to out-compete his neighbour and the corner dairy is swallowed by the supermarket. Scarcity is a disaster for most of us but a delight for the few who control the resources. The starvation of millions that followed the food crisis of 2008 was a windfall for Fonterra and dairy farmers. Putting your trust in the state will not work, because a state that reduces the competitiveness of its business sector makes itself weak and vulnerable to attack from rival states and capitals. Nor is it possible to develop an environmentally friendly sector of the economy - a "smart green economics" - that is insulated from the pressure to exploit the natural environment.

Workers power

There is a third social force though, which can exercise power directly - the working class. Because working people individually own no significant amount of the natural environment they are often seen as spectators to the real power players.

But because powerbrokers are pitted against each other they are unable to take care of the world as a whole. As the need for a general, universal solution becomes clear, the propertyless are the only people who can be trusted to take care of the system as a whole.

But this is not just about moral superiority - working people have the ability to run the economy. Although we live in a system divided into competitive blocs, it is the most co-operative ever known. Japanese auto-workers built the cars that brought us here tonight, or for the carless, Thai or Vietnamese workers made the shoes.

The food we eat, the clothes we wear, services like water and power we take for granted were produced and delivered by people working in exactly the same kind of way as us - for a wage or salary, run by managers for a profit. The basic tool for improving our position is unions - the same strategy that has always been used since capitalism began.

What's more, we are the ones who live with the results of eco-disasters, whether they are acute, like Fukushima nuclear reactor, or slow, like water depletion for dairying. We cannot all move to the Bahamas.



Many Greens have a background in socialist and anarchist milieu. But getting elected requires renouncing this past.

Political commentator Bryce Edwards quotes a letter by Sue Bradford and Keith Locke (left, in his days as a Socialist Action League member) to the National Business Review in November 1999 after being elected in which they explained their past socialism and how they had now moved on from that: *"There are lots of people with socialist backgrounds, of one type or another, in the New Zealand political world, including the media and Parliament. Generally they joined left-wing groups when young from a genuine commitment to bettering the lot of ordinary people. Like many of these people, we found our ability to bring about change through such organisations was often constricted by narrow agendas and bureaucratic socialist models. So we moved on. Green politics has a much broader agenda, connecting the needs of people and of the environment in ways that old-style socialism failed to recognise. And one of the distinguishing characteristics of Green politics is its emphasis on local empowerment through democratic structures, rather than imposing all environmental and social improvement from the top down, from the state. Like many others before us, we are maturing and learning with age and experience."*

Ecosocialism

What would a working class environmental campaign look like?

One of the problems with the environmental movement is that it is often focused not on the cities but on the countryside or wilderness, where, to be fair, often the worst depredations take place (such as lignite mining in Southland).

Assembling a movement is difficult in the country though.

Business interests are in competition not only with each other but also in an antagonistic relationship to the land (eg farmers), and in the countryside, the working class is fragmented, voiceless, and often heavily exploited (as in the freezing works).

The best that can be achieved is perhaps a campaign that draws its strength from the surrounding cities and provides leadership to progressive forces in the regions.

For socialists, an example of a good campaign would be for public transport in the cities, which made bus drivers unions the leaders and guardians of public transport. There, the interest of workers in good wages and regular work becomes a material force, defending public transport and freeing people from car-dependence and immobility. Imagine bus drivers taking industrial action by refusing to collect fares: that would be a popular, effective strike and direct action for a greener world.

Andrew Tait

BLUE-GREEN DEAL?

3News asked voters:

if John Key opened the door to a coalition deal with the Greens - should the Greens say yes.

55 percent said yes

30 percent said no

But a breakdown of the votes into a party-by-party basis tells a different story.

Amongst Green voters:

60 percent said yes

27 percent no

Amongst National voters:

63 percent said yes

25 percent said no

The Greens formally voted to leave the door open for a deal with National - but saying it's "highly unlikely".

3News also asked should the Greens become ministers with Greens voters overwhelmingly saying yes, it is time and just 12 percent said no.

Mana and working class struggle

On April 30 this year, a new political party was formed by former Maori Party MP Hone Harawira - the Mana Party. It was formed from a left split, as Harawira was expelled for opposing his party's support for the National Government.

Mana immediately drew support from veteran activist and lawyer Annette Sykes and Unite Union leaders John Minto, Mike Treen, and Matt McCarten. It has also received support from CTU vice-president Syd Keepa, activist Angeline Greensill, Ngati Kahu leader Professor Margaret Mutu and former Green MP Sue Bradford.

It's clear from the policies Hone has so far offered that he is determined to broaden his support beyond his Te Tai Tokerau electorate by appealing explicitly to Maori (and Pakeha) on working class issues. Mana will be "pro-worker" and for trade unions, anti-neoliberal (going so far as to call for a "planned economy"), and anti-rich (calling for a tax policy that targets the wealthy).

The Maori Party may have kept the support of iwi elites, Hone hopes to win the support of the majority of Maori by bringing back class politics. At the moment Mana is a Maori Party, but as Minto points out, policies that are good for working class Maori are good for Pakeha too.

Mana and the Alliance Party

Hone has support levels in his own electorate, Te Tai Tokerau, that most MPs would kill for but this cannot be taken for granted. Labour is hoping in-fighting between the Maori Party and Mana will allow it to slip its candidate into office, but if any seat in NZ can be called safe, it is probably Hone's.

It's worth comparing this level of support with the Alliance Party in the early 1990s. In 1990, New Labour, which had split from Labour eighteen months earlier, polled 5.2%. The new party, led by veteran left Labour MP Jim Anderton and claiming over 4000 members, called for public ownership, progressive taxation and full employment. The Greens won 6.3%, the Democrats (supported by small farmers, small businessmen and some workers) 1.7%, and Manu Motuhake, 5.2%. In 1992, the Alliance came within a few hundred votes of victory over National in the Tamaki by-election. Eight months later, Alliance gained 42% support and control of local government in Auckland. Then, in the 1993 general election, it scored 18.7%, when the very unpopular National Party barely retained power. The FPP electoral system, however, meant that it won only two seats in parliament.

In 1999, Alliance, with 7.7% of the vote and 10 Mps, joined Labour in government and in 2002 won only 1.2% of the vote.

The trajectory of the Alliance illustrates the

failure of an electoral approach and the limits of MMP. While the party deserves credit for raising the banner of resistance during the dark decade of the 1990s, it invested too heavily in an electoral strategy, creating a party held hostage by its parliamentary leadership. It's worth noting too that the problem was not lack of money to campaign - in the early elections Alliance had less money but won more votes than in the latter.

The most important point though, is that Alliance enjoyed far more electoral support than Mana does now. But it won that support by papering over differences.

The Alliance Party was formed from a backlash to neoliberalism, which despite dominating NZ politics since 1984, has never been endorsed by a majority of the electorate. In the 1990s, the level of anger against Labour and National's betrayal of their constituents was so high it was possible to form a party purely on that basis. This anger and sense of betrayal was certainly not limited to the working class.

Muldoon had cultivated a right-wing support base for Keynesian policies (state intervention) among farmers, small business and the working class. Labour removed farm subsidies and shut down rural post offices, gutting country communities. National followed up with 'rationalisation' of rural health services. The primary drivers of neoliberalism were a small minority of big businesspeople, with finance capital disproportionately represented.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the National and Labour governments were in permanent crisis, economically and electorally. In this climate - with widespread and savage cross-class disenchantment with Labour and National and economic crisis it seemed to Alliance that a straightforward electoral strategy had a good chance of paying off. The disparate parties that formed the Alliance may all have been anti-neoliberalism but they did not agree on much else and, while there was plenty of talk about socialism from New Labour activists, the struggle to rebuild working class organisations, like unions, was always secondary to the struggle to build cross-class appeal to win elections.

Working class, Maori, and proud

"But most importantly I want us to be a movement to rebuild the MANA of our people. MANA tamariki, MANA wahine, MANA tangata, and the MANA of our kaumatua and kuia. The MANA of beneficiaries who are treated like a blight on society. The MANA of workers who have been reduced to near slavery. The MANA of our Pacific cousins who continue to be used as cheap labour and exported home every season, and the MANA of our people, worn down by decades of deceit and dishonest dealings by the Crown, and governments who would reduce us to being no more than another ethnic minority, in our own land. And that is our greatest challenge - the restoration of MANA in a way that lifts every heart, and every soul, and challenges us to accept that only the best will do for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren."

Mana does not have the luxury of cross-class

appeal. For a start, there is racism. Hone is Maori. In a society where half the prison population is Maori, this limits his cross-class appeal. It is not impossible for a Maori to win cross-class, Pakeha support, as Winston Peters has shown, but it does make it impossible to fight for Maori rights.

This illustrates a deeper point - the inextricable links between Maori and the working class. On the left and in Maori nationalism, there is a tendency to treat Maori issues as separate from left politics. This is better than the assimilationist policies of Labour in the past, which aspired to create a little Britain in the South Pacific by suppressing Maori identity, but it is unscientific. There is no such thing as "pure" class struggle or "pure" tino rangatiratanga. Classes are formed in the same way as individuals, from the inherited traditions of the past, the pressures of the present and aspirations for the future.

Inherited traditions

Traditions can be positive or negative. One traditional goal of the workers movement in NZ - building an egalitarian version of Britain - is negative. Other traditions inherited from Britain and Ireland - class war and anti-imperialism - are positive. Similarly the tino rangatiratanga movement can draw on positive traditions of solidarity and struggle or negative traditions of tribal rivalry and aristocratic elitism.

From a working class point of view, these rival traditions are not equally valid. If it weren't for tribal rivalry, the colonisation of New Zealand would have been impossible. Some tribal leaders use aristocratic ideas to merge tradition with capitalism, as has happened in Tonga.

On the Pakeha side, ignoring the colonial dimension of capitalism in these islands meant our side was continually blindsided. The state from the earliest times has taken Maori communal land (by fair and foul means), chopped it up and distributed it among Pakeha workers to ease tensions between workers and bosses - especially after the World Wars. Also, by ignoring colonial realities, Pakeha working class organisations were unprepared for the influx of Maori and then Pacific Islanders into the cities in the 1960s and 70s. This ignorance was skilfully exploited by the Labour government and the National Prime Minister Rob "Piggy" Muldoon, with "dawn raids" and 1981 Springbok Tour.

Pressures of the present

After battlefield defeat and near-death in the 19th century, Maori have been resurgent through much of the 20th century, despite systematic racism in schools, at work, from landlords and the police - from all the institutions of the state. Maori, who make up about 14% of the population, have also become the most confident section of the working class. Labour's betrayal shattered the confidence of the unions and many labour activists were demoralised by the fall of Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe. Maori though have made gains ideologically. The

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Treaty of Waitangi may make little difference to the grocery bill of Maori families, but the ideological concessions the state has made have been great. Maori identity is validated in a way it never has been before. At the same time, of course, the real living standards of the majority of Maori have fallen. In the present, there is enormous pressure on Maori leaders from below and from above. This is an explosive contradiction. Hone Harawira represents one of the poorest electorates in the country and he, and other leaders of Mana like Annette, have lived through the battles of the 70s and 80s that are now part of the best traditions of the working class - Maori and Pakeha.

Aspirations for the future

Revolutionary socialists see class struggle as not only essential to understanding the world, but as something we play a part in. At the moment in New Zealand, the working class has an objective reality - its existence can be measured - but no subjective reality. Very few workers see themselves as part of the working class. Developing that class consciousness is one of the tasks of revolutionary socialists.

That means creating a class history, a collective memory based on the best traditions of the past, reacting to the pressures, the attacks of the present, and articulating a vision for the future. These tasks are beyond the strength of the small groups of activists who at present identify as socialists. Its not something we do on our own. An indigenous working class voice will emerge from mass struggle. At present, the clearest speech is coming from Te Tai Tokerau. The right has argued that Hone has to decide whether Mana will be a working class party or a "racist" (ie Maori nationalist) party. This is a false choice. Right now, the clearest working class voice is a Maori voice.

Andrew Tait



Mana is not a socialist party. It is not a revolutionary party. It is not even a party that has much chance of getting any more than a few percent of the vote in the upcoming elections. But Mana aims to be more than just a political party; it is the first major anti-capitalist political voice that combines the struggle of the working class together with Maori rights.

Mana is a party that formed following Hone Harawira's split from the Maori party. The Maori party does not have any orientation to a particular class; it was formed on the back of massive protests by Maori against the Labour's confiscation of the Seabed and Foreshore in 2004 and drew support from ordinary Maori and tribal business elites.

Tariana Turia left the Labour Party, saying the party had taken the Maori vote for granted for too long. When National came to power in 2008, the Maori Party joined the government. Maori identity for Turia was "beyond left and right" but joining with an openly pro-business party came at a cost. The Seabed Foreshore Act was repealed, but its replacement was no better. In the Maori Party Hone Harawira was a lone voice against this act. Maori people for many generations to come will wonder how on earth the Maori Party, which rode into power on a wave of discontent over the confiscation of Maori rights to the foreshore and seabed, claimed the bill as its own, when the only other party in this House that supports it is the party that gave us Don Brash, tax breaks for the rich, cuts in

social spending, an increase in GST, and the "three-strikes" legislation."

Harawira was expelled from the party for opposing the coalition with National. True to the spirit of resistance that created the Maori Party, Harawira saw indigenous rights as inexplicably linked to the struggle of ordinary Maori – and Pakeha - for better living standards.

"MANA is here because the Maori Party betrayed the people who put them into power, and because Labour long ago abandoned their role as defender of the working class and champion of the poor."

Maori rights should promote the welfare of those most oppressed by systematic racism throughout the history of New Zealand. Primarily, this is Maori who live at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

"When 1 percent of the country makes more than 60 percent of the country, and 250,000 children are living in poverty while the rich get tax breaks, then it's time to stop the bus, turn it around, and go back and get the kids."

Therefore when the Maori party, who claim to stand for Maori rights, supported National in the raising of GST and various other anti-working class policies that epitomise right wing politics, Harawira sensed complete hypocrisy. Along with Harawira, there was support from the activist left – especially Matt McCarten and John Minto of Unite Union, that it may be good to see the formation of a left party in parliament. This led to the birth of the Mana party.

Vote left, vote Mana?

A vote for Mana is not going to be a vote for the next government, let's be realistic. What is important is the movement Mana stands for and how it goes about achieving this. Hone Harawira has made it clear in an interview with Bryce Edwards at Otago University that he will not be working with National in any parliamentary coalition. Mana is however open to working with Labour, though any coalition at this stage is uncertain.

However, it is important to note that talk of coalitions should not be the motive for a Mana vote. A vote on left should not just be a passive vote to dispel National. Supporting left-wing parties is a chance to talk with friends, family and workmates about better alternatives for the future. Voting Mana is a first step towards creating a dialogue in this country about tino rangatiratanga and social equality.

What is most notable about Mana is its support from long-term dedicated Maori activists like Annette Sykes, Angeline Greensill and Tame Iti, who says Mana will have wider appeal than the Maori Party as it is more attractive to society's downtrodden. Mana's focus on those at the bottom of the socio-economic heap made it more attractive to the "have nots" than the Maori Party. Mana should move beyond identity politics, Sykes has said, to "embrace pakeha struggles, and oppose neo-liberal policies that put profit before people, bankers before workers and privatisation before the Treaty."

This focus has won support from Pakeha activists like Minto and ex-Green MP Sue Bradford who are not afraid of the scare campaign against 'uppity Maori' like Harawira.

Every vote for Mana is a vote that sends a message to those who do get in charge – we are here and we are vocal. Mana Party MPs can be relied on to rally support against coming attacks from a new National Government.

Jonte Rhodes & Andrew Tait

Key Policies of the Mana Party:

COST OF LIVING AND TAXATION

- Abolish GST: It's an unfair tax on working people
- First \$15,000 tax free
- "Tobin Tax" on financial speculation
- Increase benefit incomes to a living income

EMPLOYMENT

- \$15 minimum wage!
- Oppose youth wages
- Give workers' greater bargaining power and increase union access
- Create new community service jobs to reduce unemployment

HEALTH

- Eradicate third world diseases from NZ
- Provide healthy meals for children at school
- Free after hours medical care for children

EDUCATION

- Increase funding for public schools
- Use schools to provide free dental and healthcare for children
- Abolish university fees

The new sparks of labour resistance

Picket lines are popping up with greater frequency across the U.S.--and strikers are displaying a new, fighting mood that exists among growing numbers of working people fed up with being forced to pay for an economic crisis caused by Wall Street and Corporate America.

These struggles represent a challenge and an opportunity for working-class activists and socialists to put forward a strategy for taking on Corporate America and the business-backed attack on public-sector workers.

The struggles are varied. They include teachers who defied a judge's order to win a strike in Tacoma, Wash.; hospital workers who struck the Kaiser health care system in California for two days, with nurses honoring the walkout; professors on the picket line at Long Island University in New York; Hyatt hotel workers carrying out a weeklong strike at six hotels in four cities; members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) blocking trains filled with scab cargo at the port of Longview, Wash.; a strike at the Central Park Boathouse restaurant in New York City against a notorious union-buster; and the beginnings of a campaign by postal workers' unions against the assault on their members at the US Postal Service.

Workers haven't yet prevailed in all of these struggles, but what unites these fights is the activism and solidarity on display, despite a hostile corporate media and aggressive employers.

Labor's new sparks of resistance are proof positive that the defiant spirit of the battle in Wisconsin last winter wasn't a flash in the pan, but a sign that growing numbers of working people are rediscovering their capacity to struggle. After decades of a one-sided class war, the fightback has begun.

Tough battles ahead

To be sure, the battles ahead will be tough. More than 90 percent of workers in the private sector lack any union at all. And when nonunion workers try to organize, they must contend with labor laws stacked in favor of management.

And, of course, Corporate America, while enjoying record profits, is using persistent mass unemployment to extract yet more concessions from unions. In the face of these attacks, the bulk of the union leadership has been unable or unwilling to offer a strategy for resistance.

Labor's two federations, the AFL-CIO and the breakaway Change to Win group, poured money and resources into the 2008 elections to support Barack Obama. They expected payback in the form of legislation that would make it easier to organize. Instead, Obama turned his back on the unions and bailed out the bankers.

While Obama is now talking up his jobs proposal and suggesting that taxes on the rich should go up,



he's also imposed a pay freeze on federal employees, stood by while the US Postal Service threatens massive layoffs and encouraged states to pass teacher-bashing legislation. Yet he can still count on the support of almost all top labor leaders.

Even worse, union officials have been willing to sell concession-filled contracts to union members, arguing that the financial realities and risks of striking are simply too great for workers to do anything else. Instead, they cling to their strategy of "partnership" with employers and reliance on the Democratic Party.

In the Verizon strike in August, union leaders announced that workers would return to their jobs without a contract, cutting short an active struggle that rekindled the spirit of Wisconsin by winning widespread support among union and nonunion workers alike. In the auto industry, the leaders of the United Auto Workers have announced a tentative contract with General Motors that consolidates previous concessions - most importantly, the hiring of newer workers at a permanently lower tier wage. Workers at GM and Chrysler don't have the right to strike, thanks to the government-imposed bankruptcy and bailouts of those two companies.

Given the intensity of the anti-union offensive and the weak response by union officials, the surge in labor struggles are all the more significant.

The hope that the White House would usher in pro-labor policies is long gone--and the workers who are taking a stand today know that they have to rely only on their own determination and wider workers' solidarity.

Fighting back

The challenge for labor activists--as well as working people who want to organize a union where there isn't one--is to tap into the rising anger and turn it into a fightback.

In unionized workplaces, the focus for organizing among rank-and-file members may be large, like a contract campaign that effects an entire union workplace--or more modest, like issues over scheduling and workloads. In nonunion workplaces, it could be management favoritism over pay and promotions or a vindictive supervisor that sparks an organizing campaign.

However the fights break out, their chances of winning are greater if they can draw on wider

solidarity seen in Wisconsin. For example, while just 80 workers are involved in the strike at the Central Park Boathouse restaurant, their fight has become a focal point for labor and community activists around New York City, putting additional pressure on management.

In short: The greater the amount of activism and solidarity, the more leverage that workers can have.

That lesson is especially important in a fight like Verizon. Though the unions ended their two-week strike in August without a contract, the battle showed that workers have other options besides standing on the picket line and trying to last "one day longer" than multi-billion dollar corporations. During the strike, roving pickets of scabs and protests at Verizon Wireless stores damaged the company's brand and showed how unions in struggle can rally not only wider support within the labor movement, but also win the backing of nonunion workers.

While such activism is crucial to successful labor struggles, too often it's not enough, as employers mount scabbing operations intended to starve workers back to their jobs. That's why members of the ILWU took a bolder action, repeatedly blocking trains full of grain headed for a new terminal in Longview, Wash., where management is using scab labor. The longshore union defied police and the law--the kind of confrontation that's been all too rare in recent decades.

More showdowns are coming. Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel is plotting an all-out drive to break the Chicago Teachers Union, and a strike is possible in the months ahead. Republican governors are trying to outdo one another as they slash away at public-sector workers' pay and benefits and gut their collective bargaining rights. The Democrats tolerate collective bargaining - but they want deep cuts, too. And of course, business is out to deliver a deathblow to unions, demanding cuts in pay, pensions and health care even when they're sitting on big profits.

That's why growing numbers of workers have drawn the conclusion that the attacks won't end until our side is strong enough to stop them. It's time to take the initiative and step up the fight.

Socialist Worker (US)

Syria: revolt and repression



The past 48 years have represented a great continuity for the people of Syria, or in the words of historian Fawwaz Traboushi, “one single era characterized by repression, military dictatorship and one-party rule.” Syria exists as a police state where on every street corner and every restaurant people live with the knowledge that they may be being observed by secret police or the vast army of informants that have come to typify the Ba’th regime. 2011 represents a challenge to this continuity, but unlike in Egypt, Libya or Tunisia this revolution is held back by divisions and a vivid history of repression.

The last great uprising, led by the Muslim brotherhood, took place in 1982 culminating in the siege of the city of Hama. At the head of this siege was President Hafiz al-Assad’s brother Rifaat and his elite, pink uniformed ‘Defence Companies’. In three weeks the Syrian government slaughtered between ten and forty thousand people (in a city of 250,000). This is the history that Syrian’s are overcoming every day in their revolution. Rifaat now lives in London’s wealthy Mayfair district, with his son now appearing on the likes of the BBC to represent his father’s democratic credentials.

The current president of Syria is Bashar al-Assad, succeeding his father Hafiz, after his death in 2000. Hafiz’s rule had begun in 1970 in an internal Ba’th party coup, known as the Corrective Revolution. Hafiz, the first of his poor Alawite peasant family to graduate from high school, had been an air force officer from the north-western province of Latakia. The Alawi, who in Syria had long been a marginalized peasant population, are a small Islamic sect, generally considered a branch of Shi’a Islam. When Hafiz and his cohorts took power they were seen to some extent as representatives of not only the Alawi, but other sectors of Syria’s rural poor. However, lacking a popular base the young officers sort the support of Muslim Brotherhood chief Issam al-Attar. Attar gave this support in exchange for policies to benefit the brotherhood’s leading stratum among the Damascene merchant class. By 1975 this alliance had begun to fall apart as a new layer of young Islamists in the brotherhood railed against massive inflation, rising housing prices and

tensions between the Ba’th party and Palestinian radicals. This new layer of Islamists was comprised of the children of the petty bourgeoisie. They were students, teachers and professionals and typified the social base that was to spearhead the re-emergence of Islamism throughout the region.

The current uprising is very much a rural movement by those who have economically suffered the worst under the neo-liberal cronyism of Bashar al-Assad. Under his rule productive industries that once employed large numbers of youth have been dismantled, while the economy has been transformed into a rentier economy controlled by those linked to the regime. This is epitomized in the billionaire relatives of Bashar, such as Rami Makhluf (whose corruption has become a target for the revolution) and Mohamed Hamsho (who ran for a ‘workers’ seat in the last election). This is at the same time that Syria’s youth, comprising over a quarter of the population, struggle with massive unemployment rates. While Syria’s unemployment rate is on par with other countries in the region (at about 25%), the country is distinguished by youth unemployment rates that are six times higher than among older Syrian adults.

Such turbulent economic and political unrest has, however, been met with scepticism as to whether what happened in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia can be repeated in Syria. The difficulty is that the revolution has yet to spread to the economic and political hubs of the country: Aleppo and Damascus. One of the main reasons for this is the sheer scale of the regimes presence in these cities, which has stymied people’s

willingness to take to the streets. But behind this are other factors, such as the fact that the rural population has suffered worse economically than their urban counterparts. In the cities the business elites are yet to see the need to jump ship, while the religious establishment has to some extent been embraced by the regime. The neo-liberal embezzlement of Syria’s elite has trickled down to certain layers of the urban middle class, leading to passivity. In Aleppo, the large Christian minority remains supportive of the regime, for as like most other minorities in the country the current Alawite regime represents a buttress against Sunni domination of the country (Sunni represent about 74% of the population, Alawi and other non-Sunni 13%, Christians 10%, and Druze 3%).

The importance of the city is its working class. While often relegated in importance behind Twitter and Facebook in coverage of the Arab revolutions, it is the entrance of the organised working class that was pivotal in the most successful revolutions (i.e. Egypt and Tunisia). In Syria the working class has long been led by corrupt unions that have strongly supported the regime. Independent unions do not exist, the Communist parties have long been repressed and discredited through their involvement with the regime and the Arab left’s long history of allying with dictatorships has distorted the ideas of socialism and democracy. Until the working class in Aleppo and Damascus come onto the streets the revolution will persist in its current scale, with the army moving back and forward putting down isolated revolts. However, if the revolts in the hinterland of these cities spreads into the poor working class areas the isolated hubs of revolt may just turn into a national revolution.

Outside Damascus foreign powers wait to see what will unfold in this pivotal Middle Eastern state. Within the local configuration of power Syria represents the lynch pin between Iran and its Palestinian and Lebanese allies. For Saudi Arabia, Assad’s demise would provide an opportunity to break Iran’s regional influence. The rise of a democratic Syria could also rekindle the countries historic political ties with Egypt. Another factor is Turkey, which apart from being the most outspoken opponent of Syria’s current repression is seeking greater influence in the region, particularly with Egypt and the Palestinians. At the heart of all of this lies Israel and by extension the United States, who both remain unsure about what they really want in Syria. While Syria has long been in conflict with Israel, it has long walked a cautious line between antagonism and compromise, long holding out the prospect that a peace treaty could be made in exchange for the Golan Heights and greater international recognition. For many in Washington and Tel Aviv (as well as in London, Paris and Rome) the current Syrian regime is a source of aggravation, but it also provides a continuity that may be lost in any coming revolution.

Sam McDonald

Islamophobia: the new racism



Islamophobia describes how Muslims are being depersonalized and are instead being thought of as a conceptual other as an unrealistic way to deal with crises as well as a way to push a political agenda.

Islamophobia takes a variety of forms but a particularly insidious form is (quoting Glen Greenwald) "That Terrorism means nothing more than violence committed by Muslims whom the West dislikes has been proven repeatedly."

An example of this would be the media's reaction to the terrorist attacks in Norway where not only did the media start calling for a crackdown on civil liberties in Norway in order to counter Islamic terrorism before it was widely known that the attacker was in fact an anti-Muslim fascist but then the refusal to acknowledge that this was a non Muslim committing terrorism inspired by far right politics rather instead pretending that he was a disturbed individual without any political motivation despite his manifesto clearly proving otherwise.

Another widespread form of Islamophobia would be the suppression of Islamic culture such as the Swiss minaret ban as well as the much more popular banning of the niqab as in France and more recently Belgium. Although the niqab or the full burqa is not a required part of Islamic dress in many traditions the intent behind banning it is not the equality of woman nor any commitment to any specific type of Islam but rather as a distasteful form of vote-mongering by playing on petty xenophobia.

The argument from equality for banning these

coverings is completely senseless for it forces woman to choose between being stuck in the house all day or to risk harassment by police if they do not decide to conform making the resulting message that it is unacceptable for Muslims to not conform to religious and cultural norms when in public.

However one of the most disturbing events in the ongoing suppression of Islamic culture doesn't come from a populist political party but from the grass-roots movement to stop the Cordoba House community centre and mosque from being built 2 blocks away from the world trade centre

During the so called "ground zero mosque" protests the true nature of the participants was shown when an African American worker wearing a bandanna on his head was passing by the protest and was heckled by the crowd showing that they were not in fact really all that offended by Cordoba House more that they felt the existence of cultures other then their own was a threat to them.

Islamophobia as a response to crises

One of the roots of Islamophobia is that during times of crises the scapegoating of different groups of people is a common reaction. As a way of dealing with the actions of a small band of fanatics along with the constant crisis and alienation caused by capitalism people find it satisfying to rally behind their nationality in order to blame all of their problems on Muslims who they consider to be the "other".

In order to do this racist myths are formed about the target group, the popular one in this case being the spectre of Sha'ria law being

brought about by a supposed alliance of "cultural Marxists" and conservative clerics.

Islamophobia as a political tool

Once these myths have been established they are then manipulated by politicians and agitators with their own agenda to push who are often too cynical to care about the validity of those claims so long as it furthers their own cause.

An example of this would be how President Obama, himself no real opponent whatsoever to the neo-liberal cause is constantly accused of being a secret Muslim by those on the far right so as to capitalize on anti-Muslim hysteria even with the full knowledge that the claim is entirely without evidence and that by spreading such conspiracy theories they are furthering anti-Muslim sentiment.

Islamophobia and violence

As this culture of anti-Islamic sentiment has formed and been amplified by the media it does not follow that it is still sensible to assume that incidents of anti-Islamic violence are completely isolated occurrences whose motivations spring fully formed from the minds of the offender.

It is therefore imperative for socialists and anyone else disturbed by this trend to condemn the culture that makes overt actions against Muslims acceptable like any other form of racism by opposing it on both a personal and a political level.

Opposing racism can be as simple as calling a friend out on a racist joke to the more difficult task of recognizing your own prejudices up to the political level to campaign against those who prey on people's prejudices to gain power.

Oliver Young

Anders Behring Breivik's vile manifesto, which sought to justify his actions, made the horror all the more stark. These murders were not the act of a psychopath - they were the actions of a man following the logic of a racist ideology which demonises Muslims. Islamophobia is the thread that runs from the top of society through to the gutter that Breivik and his fellow racists crawl out of. Breivik and the fascists target everyone who stands up for tolerance. Trade unionists, students, socialists and LGBT people are all the enemy.

Even when the mainstream media finally acknowledged that Muslims had not carried out the attack, deep Islamophobia was exposed. Reports claimed that Muslims were at the root of the problem because their presence has "destabilised" European countries. While Breivik was being condemned, it was implied that he had valid concerns.

Islamophobia has become the respectable racism. It is not just the English Defence League (EDL) and assorted fascists and racists who attack Muslims. When politicians and their media lackeys do so, they deny they are being racist because they do not talk about "race". Instead the racism is couched in references to "culture".

Most recently David Cameron, Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy have all publicly denounced multiculturalism. This has become a code for saying that there is something wrong with Muslim culture.

This week Belgium joined France in making it illegal for a woman to wear a burqa in public. Such laws legitimise the bigotry of the fascists. Politicians and media commentators rightly express outrage at the attacks in Norway. But they need to look a bit closer to home for the fuel that is feeding the racists. Breivik wanted to start a race war and he thought the conditions were ripe. He wanted to use the poison of Islamophobia to mobilise his friends in the EDL and others across Europe.

What happened in Norway could happen anywhere. We have an urgent task. We need to get organised and confront the racists wherever they raise their heads.

Socialist Worker (UK)

Socialist Review joins Socialist Worker and other Socialist groups around the world in sending solidarity and sympathy to the families, friends and comrades of the victims of the massacre in Norway

Israel and the chocolate factory: Boycotts, divestment & sanctions movement in Australia

In March this year, I left my hometown in Dunedin and moved to Melbourne, Australia and became involved in the BDS campaign against Israel's war against the Palestinians.

The acronym 'BDS' stands for 'boycotts, divestments and sanctions' and draws its inspiration from the earlier campaigns against South African apartheid. The BDS campaign aims to de-legitimise the apartheid state of Israel. It is a means by which we seek to express international solidarity with the heroic resistance of the Palestinian people.

Our protests against an Israeli-owned company - Max Brenner - have provoked massive reaction from apologists for Israel's campaigns and from the Australian political and media elite. Max Brenner is a large multi-national corporation that specialises in selling hot chocolate. It is also a part of the 'Strauss Group' an Israeli owned conglomerate which openly supports the Israeli armed forces.

The Strauss Group website states:

Our connection with soldiers goes as far back as the country, and even further. We see a mission and need to continue to provide our soldiers with support, to enhance their quality of life and service conditions, and sweeten their special moments. We have adopted the Golani reconnaissance platoon for over 30 years and provide them with an ongoing variety of food products for their training or missions, and provide personal care packages for each soldier that completes the path.

The Golani brigade of the Israeli army has a particularly brutal history in the occupation of Palestine. For example in 1995 the New York Times described their actions in one village near Bethlehem, where Palestinian youths were dragged onto a bus full of Israeli soldiers, who beat their clubs on the steel frames and chanted in unison 'We are Golani! We are insane'.

The reasons for targeting Max Brenner as a part of the BDS campaign are obvious. This is a company that proudly and unashamedly supports the genocide of the Palestinian people. The first BDS protest I attended was in late March. From the onset, there was a large police presence. When we made it to the store, the police blocked our entrance, after some attempts to break through the police line we settled down in front of the store to listen to speeches. While we were doing this, we were interrupted by a group of around 30 Zionists, replete with Israeli flags, placards and vicious anti-Arab racism. Despite being spat on and having racist abuse hurled at us, we remained calm and continued chanting. The police formed a 'protective' cordon in front



of the counter-protest, and several comrades were pushed and punched.

On July 1st, we had another demonstration. Around 150 to 200 pro-Palestinian activists marched through the Queen Victoria shopping centre and made their way to the Max Brenner store. The police were there before us and made a line in front of the shop window. A group of us linked arms and stood in front of them while the rest of the demonstration stood in front of the picket line and lead the chanting. I was holding a small Palestinian flag and for no reason I can think of the cop behind me grabbed it from me, broke it and threw it away. Things were to become much uglier. The riot police turned up at our demonstration and attacked those of us who were gathered in front of the picket line. The riot squad formed a line in front of the picketers while the police who were behind us started pushing and yelling. Eventually the two lines of police closed ranks and pushed the picket line away from the shop window; we were completely encircled and by now most of the police officers had discreetly removed their name badges. One by one anyone who looked like a leader of the protest was violently seized and arrested. In all, 19 comrades were arrested and charged with trespass, disorderly conduct and 'besetting', an antiquated and rarely used anti-union law aimed specially at people who picket premises.

Between this protest and the next, everyone involved tried to get their heads around this outburst of police brutality. There was an overwhelming consensus among us that despite the very real possibility of being violently assaulted and arrested, the campaign had to find some way to respond.

In the meantime politicians and the media went completely berserk. In one source, the arrested activists were called 'pro-jihadists and leftist

thugs.' In Australia, articles and commentators in the media blasted us as anti-Semitic. One notorious right wing television presenter (Andrew Bolt) even compared our actions outside Max Brenner to Nazi Germany's Kristallnacht! Politicians from all quarters joined the bandwagon. Former Prime minister Kevin Rudd made a visit to Max Brenner to show his solidarity with Israel, while Michael Danby, a Labor MP said BDS activists are "prejudiced fanatics who should look into their soul".

How could the media get it so wrong? The BDS campaign is not remotely anti-Semitic, many of the activists involved were Jewish, and there were even Israeli citizens who had spoken out in support of it.

Accusations of anti-Semitism were being used by the defenders of Israel to defame and silence us, but none of us were ashamed of what we were doing. On the 29th July, a crowd of 300 demonstrators marched again on Max Brenner. The media presence was large, as was the police. Our ranks had swelled because the repression of the previous demonstration had inspired many to take action. The police kept their distance, possibly because they did not want to use their ugly tactics in front of the news cameras. However on August 8th four members of the BDS campaign were arrested in their homes during dawn raids and charged with breaking their bail conditions.

Australia's elite are united in their support for Israel. Israel is a loyal servant of US imperialism in the Middle East, and provides vital 'stability' in this strategic region. It's no surprise then that the BDS campaign has generated such hostility, and has been met with such repression.

One thing is clear, though: we're not going away.

Gayaal Iddamalgoda

Capitalism: not sustainable

A little over 200 years ago, the first large-scale coal mines were dug in the English countryside with the aid of a new machine. The steam engine allowed water that frequently flooded mines to be pumped out and as the mines reached deeper and deeper, coal production soared. Mines began to use coal to produce more coal.

For the first time in human history, industry was freed from its reliance on rural, scattered sources of power like watermills and draught animals, and could concentrate on a truly massive scale. In the decades that followed, the new engine was applied to every area of industry. When it was applied to transport, railroads criss-crossed Britain, Europe and then the world, allowing record amounts of goods to be shipped great distances overland at speed. Steamships cut ocean voyages in half, and broke maritime transport's reliance on seasonal winds. Another mineral fuel, kerosene, lit the burgeoning cities and enabled production to be pushed into the deepest hours of the night. With the advent of electricity, and an even more powerful engine fuelled by oil, the process repeated itself on an even grander scale.

Today, minerals extracted out of the earth on which we stand – coal, oil and natural gas – provide more than 70% of the world's energy needs. They fire the majority of the world's power stations and fuel much of our transportation. But it has not been without a cost. Minerals are produced slowly, and cannot be readily replaced. Huge scars are left on the Earth's surface in the hunt for them, devastating vast tracts of vegetation, not just to build the mines themselves, but the roads and infrastructure needed to support them, and the dense industrial conglomerations to consume their product. Pollutants from the extraction process filter into waterways, contaminating streams and reservoirs that provide the water to millions of people, and the products themselves seep out of the reservoirs, bores and pipelines, releasing hazardous substances into the oceans and atmosphere. Of course, it doesn't end there. When mineral fuels are finally put into use, they are burnt; releasing gases and particulate matter that interact with the atmosphere to produce chemicals dangerous to the environment and human beings. Coal smog once covered London so thickly, it was difficult to breathe. The Great Smog of 1952 killed more than 4000 people in only 4 days. Other types of smog remain a persistent problem in many cities around the world, and smoke from coal fires and vehicle emissions contribute to respiratory ailments like asthma and to increased rates of



In October 2011 the container ship Rena ran aground off the coast of Tauranga and began spilling oil. This mural on a shipping container at Papamoa, expresses concerns over the lack of action around this ecological disaster. credit: "Mr G Dogathon 100"

cancer. Finally, even the cleanest-burning mineral fuels result in the production of carbon dioxide, which accumulates in the atmosphere and contributes to global warming.

With so much damage done by fossil fuels, you'd think our government would do everything possible to expand renewable energy production and reduce our dependence on coal, gas and oil. Sadly, you'd be wrong. Rather than reducing our reliance on these rather old-fashioned sources of energy, our government's energy strategy is centred on further exploiting these resources. Plans to expand coal mining into previously protected areas were floated last year. While Gerry Brownlee's designs for our national parks were thwarted, a coal mine is planned for near Mataura, and existing mines in Westland, Southland and Otago continue to haul as much coal out of the ground as ever. The government has recently signed a contract with the Brazilian company Petrobras, allowing deep-sea drilling off our coasts for the first time. It was the drilling of deep-ocean wells that led to the Horizon deep-sea spill off the coast of Louisiana in 2009. And if that wasn't enough, natural gas prospectors have raised the possibility of using hydraulic fracturing – better known as 'fracking' – to extract natural gas on the East Coast. Fracking is a particularly damaging process in which water is mixed with a cocktail of chemicals and pumped into the ground at high pressure in order to fracture the rock and release the gas. In the process, nearby groundwater may become contaminated with natural gas or chemicals from the fracking mixture, which poses a danger to wildlife in the region and any people who depend on that water for drinking or general use. Fracking is already in use in Taranaki. In short, energy and environmental policy is going in exactly the wrong direction, making all the problems of pollution and climate change worse.

But why? Strangely enough, the answer doesn't actually lie in the field of energy policy,

bad as the National Government's policy is. It is not increased demand for energy, or dwindling supplies of cheap oil, or the possibility of turning coal into natural gas that is behind the drive to exploit ever more marginal sources of fossil fuels – important though these factors are. Beneath all of these, a deeper process is at work. What is driving the trend towards increased extraction, and what is driving it towards an even faster fever pitch in recent years is the central economic process of capitalism: the accumulation of capital.

The central goal of production in a capitalist society – in our society – is to turn a profit, to end with more money in the hands of the capitalist class, to end have more money lining the pockets of the owners of big business and their cronies, than there was when production started. To do this, the capitalists must bring together all the elements necessary for society's goods – all the bread and all the clothing and all the houses etc etc – in such a way that as to force an increase in the total product of society, and rig it so that the better part of that increase flows eventually to them. This is achieved by creating a working class that has no control over their workplaces, that can be made to work as hard and as long as possible. In a profit-driven society divided in this manner firms compete amongst each other to squeeze the biggest possible profit out of their workers because the capitalist that gets the biggest profit will be able to buy up some of the other capitalists, and will be able to make even bigger profits next time. So it becomes imperative for capitalists to make the biggest possible profit.

When profit becomes that important, capitalists don't just stand still hoping it will come to them. They start moving the productive resources of society around, chasing the biggest profits. If the biggest profits can be made in the shipbuilding trade, capitalists invest in shipyards. When cars were the way of the future, they built car factories. When the dot-com bubble rose

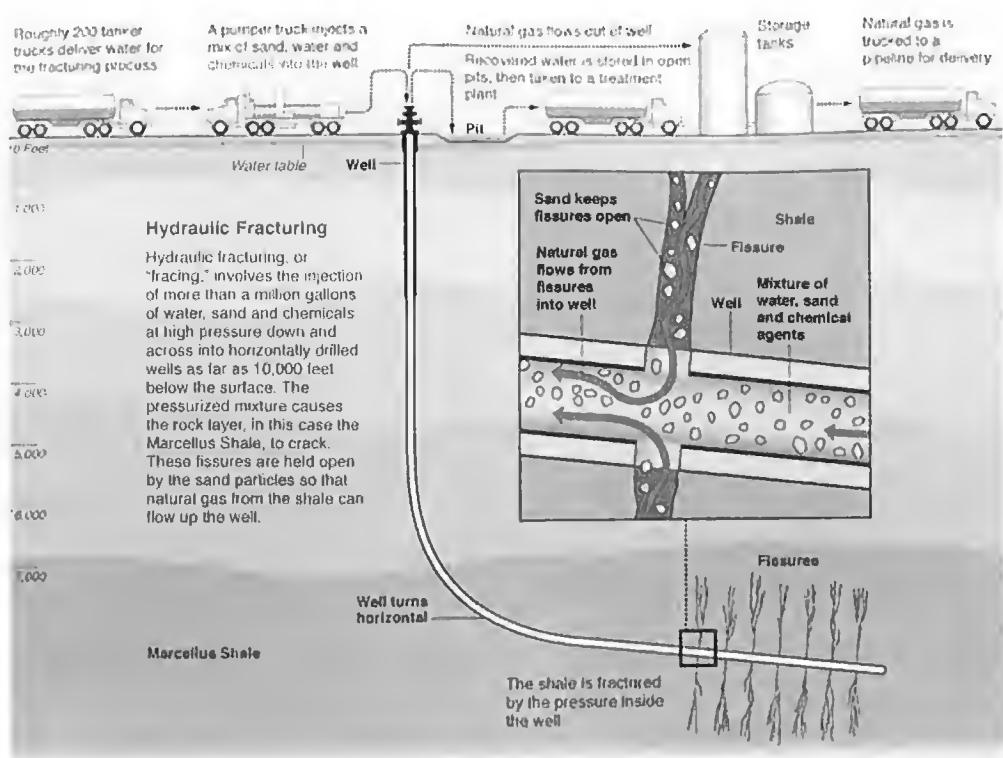
ENVIRONMENT

they built Silicon Valley. When mortgage finance boomed, they built houses and skyscraper apartments. New and expanding areas of the economy experience a rise in investment until it reaches fever-pitch. But as more and more investors rush in, all hoping for a piece of the action, the profit to be made is divided up amongst an ever greater number of competing capitalists. The intensity of competition rises and profits begin to fall. Then the bubble bursts. The competition that is an integral part of capitalist society leads straight into a crisis.

This is exactly what has happened to our economy. The economy of most of the world has just been through a major crisis, founded on a property boom. But it wasn't just an economic crisis, it was also a financial crisis. Everywhere, property developers borrowed money to build every kind of building – houses, apartment blocks, condominiums, shopping malls. While the bubble kept growing, the developers could make profits from rents and increasing property values, and the banks could make a profit by continuing to loan money out at interest. But when the bubble collapsed, the profits disappeared. Suddenly everybody was left with gigantic loans to pay, and no money to pay them with. The banks, no longer able to make a profit from interest payments, demanded their money back. They economy needs cash, more of it, and fast. But where can you get money for free?

Now, if we look at society's productive resources, we find they can be divided up into two broad categories. The physical constituents – the tools, the buildings, the materials etc etc, and the labour that turns these into new items of greater value. The labour part is simple enough – it's the sum total of the wages that are paid to all the workers. The physical constituents however, come in a variety of forms. Basically, there are three types: 1) fixed capital – the machinery and buildings; 2) auxiliary substances – the electricity, oil to keep machines running, etc; and 3) raw materials – the things that are actually transformed into a product, like flour into bread, aluminium into cans etc. Normally most of these have to be paid for – this is certainly the case for buildings, electricity etc. But for some industries, the raw materials are found in nature. They are more or less just lying about in their finished form. The extractive industries – coal, natural gas, oil and minerals mining fall into this category. In these industries, profits can be accumulated more quickly, because you don't have to pay for the raw materials the way, say, a bread factory pays for flour. From the standpoint of economics textbooks, they are a 'free gift of nature' – whatever trash might be talked about the triple bottom line. Money might not grow on trees, but it does fall from them, ready to be plucked, and you can pull it up out of the ground.

Here we have it then: the government and the business sectors want to pay the debts they have accumulated with profits from mineral extraction. There are other sectors where profits can be made directly from nature. But they have mostly reached the maximum extent to which they can without intensifying investment and negating the effect of the 'free gift' on profit margins. Think of the intensification of dairy



Graphic by Al Granberg

farming for example. If agribusiness wants more cows, it will need to start literally stacking them on top of one another, and fork out for supplementary housing, feed and electricity to keep them warm all year-round. All this eats into the extra profits that made it especially attractive in the first case. But this is not the case for mining, at least not yet. There is still space for mining to be expanded using the mostly existing infrastructure and technology, or at least technology and infrastructure imported at somebody else's expense.

As I mentioned earlier, the results are, and will be devastating. The government and the business sectors are literally trying to dig their way out of the crisis. It's no accident that the economies that weathered the economic crisis best – China, Norway, Canada and Brazil – all have extractive industry as a major part of their economy. The capitalist classes of the rest of the world, including New Zealand, have their backs against the wall and will do just about anything to catch up. The crisis pushes them to expand extraction deeper and deeper than ever before, regardless of the dangers. Hence they do little about the rapidly approaching oil peak, or the gas cliff. Hence, they mine deeper and deeper into more dangerous areas, like the fault-lines around Pike River Mine, becoming more and more reckless with health and safety, with the lives of the workers, the livelihood of communities and the quality of the environment. The disaster at Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia is another example of health and safety, and the lives of workers being sacrificed for the sake of profit. And in the Gulf of Mexico, the years and months that proceeded the disastrous deep water Horizon spill were years of cut-backs, of loosening environmental legislation, of granting 'exceptions', even under the liberal, 'lesser evil' of the Obama administration. Why does the capitalist class turn a blind eye to such costs?

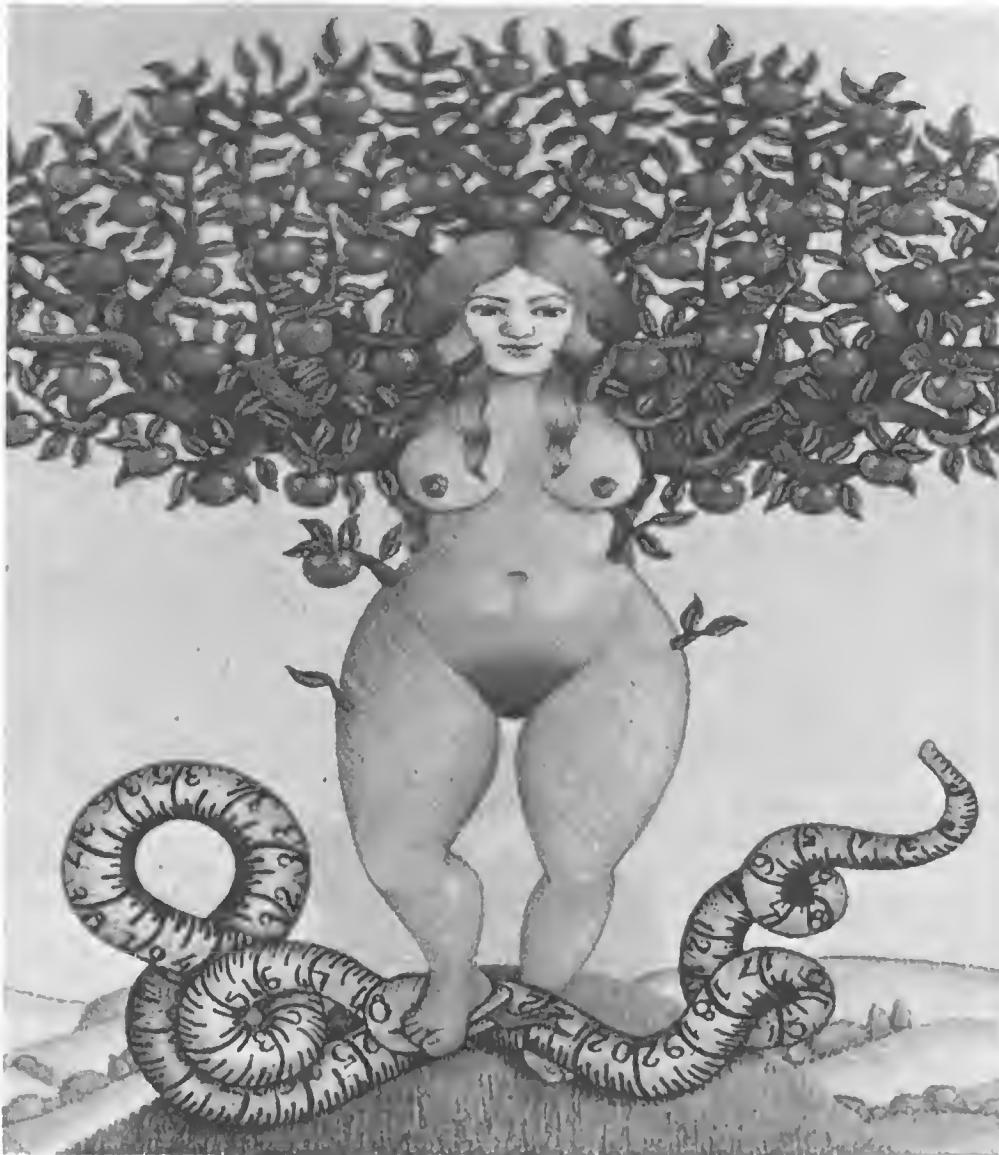
Because they see what the economic crisis has done to the rest of the world. They see what has happened to Greece, to Ireland and to Spain. They are willing to play roulette with our environment, our health and even our lives because if they don't, they could be the next ones out of the game.

And, actually, they're right. If we don't mine, they could be out of the game. But what we need, is a game changer. If we don't want to see a repeat of Pike River, if we don't want to see global warming wreak even greater havoc on our environment and our food supply, if we don't want to see our drinking water contaminated with benzene, ethylene glycol, hydrochloric acid and the million and one other constituents of the fracking fluid, if we don't want to see a repeat of the deep water Horizon disaster off the coast of Gisborne, then we need to change the system. At this point I think it's important to acknowledge that it's not enough to work within the system to achieve change. Getting around a table and negotiating with the mine owners and the government doesn't address the main issues – you can't negotiate away the economic crisis.

What we need rather, is the same thing that the workers at the Hillside engineering works need. At Hillside, they make trains – thus making Hillside central to a green economy. But instead of ramping up production and hiring more workers, government-owned Kiwi Rail is laying workers off and reducing production – all because it isn't profitable. At the end of the day the only thing that is going to save Hillside engineering works and ensure a more sustainable future for the world is for the workers there to say No! and to take action themselves to stop the losses. Negotiation will only get them so far – it's action that will change the priorities of Kiwi Rail, and it is action that we need to change the system.

Cory Anderson

The Tyranny of Slenderness



Everywhere we look we see the image of the 'perfect body', an emaciated body is projected onto us by this exploitative system as a way to repress the majority who cannot conform. An emaciated body, representing the emotional, spiritual, mental and physical hunger we all experience under an economy based on exploitation and profit, rather than human need. A body that everyone wants but no one can achieve; for this body is not real. Just as the body on the billboard advertising the latest fashion, has been warped, cropped and coloured to trick us into believing that the emaciated and sick is beautiful, so too does capitalism warp, crop and colour our exploitation to blind us of the reality of this sick and corrupted system. This body dominates our thoughts and conversations as well as those who judge us by it. It dominates how we feel about ourselves. It dominates our television screens and creates huge amounts of profit for fashion, weight loss clinics, pharmaceutical companies, cosmetic surgeons and other parasitical industries feeding off the vulnerable. This body represents perfectly the unsustainable system which dominates our world, but sadly it also represents the domination and emotional hunger experienced in many people's lives.

This is the tyranny of slenderness!

This emaciated body has not always been the ideal for women to conform to. There was a time under capitalism that a curvaceous woman was the picture of beauty. So why has this changed? Why do so many women strive for the pre-pubescent, boyish figure which we are brainwashed into thinking is normal for a grown woman? Why do almost all women think that a size 12 is fat? Why are most women not happy with the way they look? Why do we live in a society where people starve themselves to death or eat themselves into oblivion?

There are so many places to point the finger too, but more than often we point it ourselves or at one another rather than pointing it at those who impose their ideologies upon us for their own benefit. How often do we judge those people walking down the street who do not fit in the box of a 'healthy

The body often shows us the physical manifestation of the brunt of our physical, emotional and spiritual exploitation under capitalism. Just as a worker in a factory may be cursed at by their bosses for not working fast enough because of pain in their hands and backs from hours of repetition, so too do we get cursed and abused by capitalism for our bodies physical manifestations of the exploitation we experience in our everyday lives.

weight? All too often there are snide remarks and laughter which follow those who are overweight or gasps and looks of horror at those who no longer eat. Both those who eat to a point of excess and those who starve themselves are representing the lack of control we have over our lives. Some people feel that the only thing they can control is what they eat and so when they realise they cannot control any other aspect of their lives they restrict themselves from participating in one of the fundamental acts of keeping ourselves alive.

The anxiety girls and women experience from feeling unattractive is arguably one of the most pervasive and damaging consequence of advertising and mainstream media. Only one body type is almost always presented in the media and in advertisements -- that of a very tall, thin woman -- a woman who would meet the criteria for anorexia as 15% below normal weight. In reality, this unhealthy body shape is unattainable for 99% of women.

Eating disorders are a symptom of a sick society. A society that celebrates thin women in the media, advertising film and chastises women deemed overweight. 'A WOMAN can't be too rich or too thin.' So said the Duchess of Windsor, and so says every fashion and beauty magazine, every television ad, every weight loss centre, and even many families, friends and doctors.

The most well-known eating disorder, anorexia nervosa, is the third most common chronic illness among young women. Anorexic women suffer from the perception that they are

WOMEN'S LIBERATION

overweight, when they are in fact often dangerously thin. Other common eating disorders include bulimia nervosa, in which a person binges and then purges themselves (usually by self-induced vomiting), and binge eating, in which a person cannot control their desire to overeat. While some men experience eating disorders, over 90% of people with them are women.

Naomi Klein's book *The Beauty Myth* (1990) powerfully documents the effects of the unattainable body ideal on women's physical and mental health, and indicts the fashion, cosmetics and plastic surgery industries, which benefit from women's misery to the tune of billions of dollars a year.

These profits are made by creating a deep sense of dissatisfaction amongst millions of women about their bodies, a dissatisfaction that is growing with the growing gap between the 'ideal' body and reality.

Media images do have a powerful effect, but they are also continually reinforced in everyday life. Comments on women's appearance are so commonplace and accepted that we can underestimate the effect they have on how women see themselves.

These powerful media images indicating a thin women is a good women are affecting people at a younger and younger age. In some disturbing statistics presented by the British journal of psychology half of three to six-year-old girls say they worry about being fat. By the age of seven, 70 per cent of girls want to be thinner. By nine, half have been on a diet. For girls aged between 11 and 17, it's their number one wish in life. This may seem surprising, but when you think of the images seen in advertising, billboards, magazines, films and TV which glorify and focuses on thin actors, actresses, models and other 'successful' and 'important' figures it doesn't seem so surprising after all.

In a study of children's movies and books for messages about the importance of appearance, media targeted for children were heavily saturated with messages emphasizing attractiveness as an important part of relationships and interpersonal interaction. Among the movies used in the study, two Disney movies contained the highest amount of messages about personal beauty. This study also found 64% of the videos studied portrayed obese characters as unattractive, evil, cruel, unfriendly, and more than half of the portrayals involved the consideration or consumption of food.

Representation of overweight individuals in prime time programming is not representative of the actual proportion in the population. Only 14% of females and 24% of males featured in the top ten prime-time fictional programs of 2003 were overweight. Those that were shown had few romantic interactions, rarely shared affection with other characters, and were frequently shown consuming food.

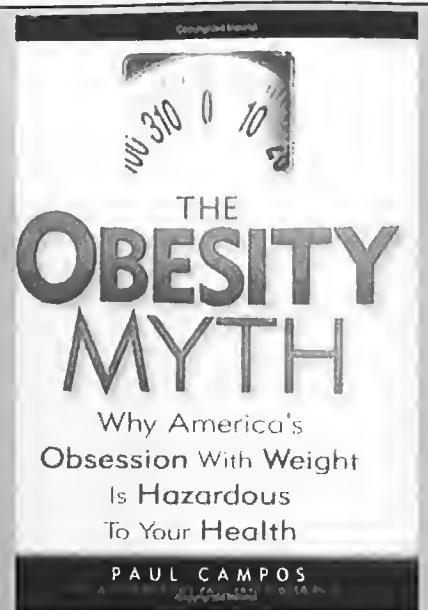
Many times, even these "beautiful" women are deemed not good enough for advertisements. Photographs are airbrushed or otherwise altered to remove any lines, bumps, or lumps - anything less than "perfection." If the ideal of beauty is physically unattainable, then consumers will never be able to attain the image they want, and

The obesity crisis has been over-hyped, lawyer and author Paul Campos writes in his book, *The Obesity Myth*

'In the US, life expectancy rose from 75.2 to 77.4 years between 1990 and 2002, at the same time that there was supposedly an explosion of "obesity"', he says. 'Weight loss is a \$50 billion per year industry in the US alone. So part of the current panic is a product of the fact that panic over weight is profitable for many powerful social interests. In the last six months alone the entire US food industry has retooled itself to cash in on the low-carb diet craze. Each new diet fad is a huge money-making opportunity for economic interests all along the chains of production and consumption.'

Campos also says that gender stereotyping plays a crucial role in terms of the obesity crisis: 'The feminine ideal in regard to weight is drastically different than it is for men. For example, if Jennifer Aniston had the same body mass index figure as her husband Brad Pitt, she would weigh 55 pounds more than she does.'

'Dieting is detrimental to health, because weight cycling (the outcome of almost all dieting) appears to be more dangerous than maintaining even a quite high stable weight. Plus, weight cycling makes people fatter, on average, than they would be otherwise. Thus the diet industry is actually causing the "disease" it claims to be curing.'



therefore there will be an endless demand for new beauty products.

This is the reason for the incredible proliferation of the weight-loss, fashion, and cosmetics industries, which are among the largest and most profitable consumer industries.

As a result, the millions of women and girls who are unable to reach this standard of beauty feel a sense of failure, shame, and guilt. In 1984 a survey of 33 thousand woman was taken showing that most women would choose losing 5 to 7kg over success in work as their most desired goal. This clearly shows how this desire to be thin infiltrates out from women's individual lives into the advancement of their careers, participation in their unions and the political arena. Naomi Wolf describes dieting as the most potent political sedative in women's history. The concern about weight leads to a virtual collapse of self-esteem and sense of effectiveness in women's lives.

This change in perception of women's ideal body came into being as a dominant feature of women's everyday lives can be linked to women's liberation movement of the 60s and 70s. The Women's liberation was leading to a more assertive, politically clear, self-confident woman, the opposite traits of women concerned about their weight. What Naomi Wolf describes as caloric restriction was a means to take the oomph out of our desires to be treated as equal and has warped the struggle for our liberation from a mass movement into an individual struggle against our own bodies.

The distorted, unattainable, sexist mass images are a product of the exploitation of women as

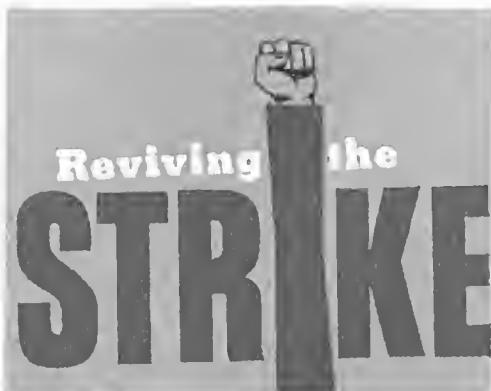
wage workers, unwaged domestic labourers and sex objects. They are an inevitable consequence of (and prop for) a system in which those with power benefit from the exploitation of women in the home and the workplace. Undermining women's self-confidence not only keeps them buying more and more products in their struggle to attain an ideal, but also helps to keep them from challenging their roles.

Campaigns to change the images without changing the social conditions which produce them and give them their power can advance things only so far. Legislation to ban particular types of advertisements, or regulating the size and shape of fashion models, doesn't challenge the basis upon which it is so lucrative for industries to use such images to sell their products.

The most effective way to combat sexist images is to develop a mass movement which aim to change women's unequal living conditions in a whole range of spheres and out of which alternative images, will develop. This will also challenge the nuclear family structure, the unpaid work in the home which the majority of women undertake and the pay gap between women and men. But further than this women's liberation cannot be achieved by women alone, it has to be a part of a working class movement, intent on creating equality for all oppressed groups not just for women. A working class movement is the only way to completely topple and smash this tyranny of slenderness!

Rowan McArthur

Reviving the right to strike



The New Unionism Network interviewed **Joe Burns, union negotiator, U.S. attorney and author of "Reviving the Strike: How working people can regain power and transform America" (IG Publishing, 2011).**

This book looks primarily at the situation in the U.S.A., and Joe asked him what lessons other countries might take from his research. In short, he believes that we need to build a new unionism — one which is based on global solidarity and is willing and able to contest management decisions and, if necessary, stop production.

It's conventional wisdom that the strike weapon is not what it was. In many countries, the number of days lost to industrial action has plummeted since the 1980s. What would your advice be to young unionists who are wrestling with this conundrum?

It is important to understand that modern labor laws are set up for labor to lose. In the United States, employers have never accepted the right

to strike. After seventy five years of anti-labor legislation and bad court decisions, U.S. labor law prevents successful strike activity. Workers are forced to fight battles isolated and alone, confronting massive corporations. A similar process has occurred in other countries, including England, Australia and Canada.

In these and other countries, from the 1930s through the 1970s, trade unionists built a strong labor movement. Their voice was backed by a powerful strike weapon. At the heart of this was union solidarity, in the form of industry-wide strikes involving hundreds of thousands of workers striking at once. Unions employed tactics that allowed workers to join together across industries to confront employers as a class. At the level of ideas, trade unionists contested the very right of management to unilaterally make business decisions.

For a generation of new trade unionists, the key to resolving problems of capital mobility and the shifting of work is to reject the underlying pro-management orientation of modern labor law. This means reviving the effective strike, employing solidarity across international borders, and contesting the very right of management to ship jobs around the world.

Reviving the effective strike; developing solidarity across borders; and contesting management decisions. What strikes me about this recipe is that it's not too different for other countries. Could it be that this recipe of yours is one for the international movement to consider?

I think so. We need to ask ourselves why, from the 1930s to the 1970s, strikes could bring entire industries to a halt. The answer doesn't lie in national conditions, but in the nature of the strike. These earlier actions were intentionally geared towards stopping production. Tactics were based on the assumption that unless the

employer felt economic pain, in the form of loss of production and profit, then the strike would have little effect. The strike was not an end in itself. For this reason unions in many countries saw it as part of their organizing job to foster solidarity actions and boycotts, at times even spiraling into country-wide or national strikes.

In today's modern economy, we need to consider how to achieve this at international level. We're dealing with major multinational corporations who have no concern for national boundaries. Only we, as a global labor movement, can confront these corporations with a new unionism that is capable of shutting down production on a global scale.

Part of this must include a union philosophy that challenges the "right" of corporations to make unilateral business decisions. Underlying the current system of labor control in most countries is a pro-management ideology that assumes workers have no interest in the plants and corporations their labor has helped to create. We know this to be a false assumption. However, if management is allowed to ignore their employees, and prevent unionization and collective bargaining (by shifting work off through corporate restructuring), then working people cannot win. This is true no matter how determined and militant we are.

So if you had a single message for the international labour movement, expressed as directly and as simply as possible, what would it be?

In order to win against global corporations we need a new unionism — one which is based on global solidarity and is willing and able to contest management decisions and, if necessary, stop production.

Joe Burns

<http://newunionism.wordpress.com/2011/10/04/reviving-the-strike/>

Sex and class in the 19th century



A novel that has been chopped and changed for movies and television many times, the latest offering in 2011, of a 2 hour BBC-films adaptation starring Mia Wasikowska, does an excellent job of transmitting the message of the story.

To the modern eye, the sometimes cruel, sometimes kind romance of Eyre and Rochester seems demeaning with the stilted language that women use in the presence of men, the attempt to essentially throw away the man's original wife because she didn't live up to expectations, the thread of subservience that runs throughout the plot, one could quite easily come to the conclusion that this is a reactionary piece. However, to ignore the strength of the Jane Eyre character herself, as many do, is a result of reactionary prejudices towards female characters in literature.

Mia Wasikowska portrays Jane Eyre neither as a woman entirely accepting the system around her, nor as some kind of warrior against it. Instead, the character becomes someone who, though sometimes frightened of the consequences that her class would bestow upon her, still does what she believes is right. Michael Fassbender as Edward Rochester shows his character to be a torrid mix of 'good' and 'bad'. He comes clearly off in the

beginning as being the ruling-class, entitled bastard that one expects him to be, and he never truly escapes that. However, the fight that is shown against it, and the consequences it brings for him hint at a far, far more complex relationship with the system that one expects.

In the end, romance as a genre is difficult. Though love and relationships are central to the human condition, the inherent bigotry and sexism of society always will be seen in literature. The same can be said for the 2011 Jane Eyre film — the supposedly 'plain' Jane is in fact an upright example of Hollywood's standards of beauty, and ignoring such facts does injustice. However, the film makes an attempt to explore the contradictions and cruelties that exist as long as the system does. It doesn't allow its characters to escape those contradictions either, merely giving them a defensive line to stand upon.

James Gluck

How do revolutions happen?

Recent dramatic events across North Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere once again pose an important question – what makes a revolutionary situation?

The Russian revolutionary Lenin wrote that revolutions become possible when two conditions meet and clash. Is it when the exploiters can no longer rule in the old way, and that “the lower classes do not want to live in the old way”.

A revolutionary situation has three features. First, the government loses control of part of its normal apparatus of rule to a challenging force. Second, a significant part of the population backs the challengers’ claims. Third, the government is not able to repress the challengers and their supporters.

“Political revolutions”

There are some forms of revolutionary situation where the mass of the population is excluded from participation, and not by the military.

One writer derided the revolution that brought parliamentary democracy to Hungary as a “media event”. The new regimes rapidly introduced neoliberal market reforms and privatisation, with many former Communist Party functionaries re-emerging as rich private capitalists.

In South Africa, despite the immense struggles against apartheid, the African National Congress (ANC) made a pact with the old white rulers, preserving their privileges and forgiving their crimes. Two years after assuming office, the ANC adopted neoliberalism, condemning most black South Africans to decades of continuing poverty.

These revolutions were “deflected” away from popular involvement – by liberal, socialist and communist party leaders, middle class oppositionists, churchmen and others. There were revolutions, but they were limited to “political revolutions”, where the class structures of the old societies remained essentially intact.

Even in East Germany and Czechoslovakia in 1989, where mass demonstrations brought down the regimes, there was little independent working class activity and organisation. Millions of workers believed that the introduction of the market would bring them the freedom they demanded. Socialism had become a dirty word.

Now, after more than two decades of practical experience of neoliberalism, and with global capitalism locked in crisis, new revolutionary situations are already exploding. The illusions of the past are breaking, and exciting new possibilities are emerging.

Advances and retreats

The path from a revolutionary situation to its outcome is never straightforward. There are leaps and reverses, advances and retreats. Such phases



Concrete demands: Workers from Tora Concrete Factory in Mahalla, Egypt, after they won pay rises through a sit-down strike. A slow-burning strike wave in Egypt's industrial heartland that started in about 2006 exploded into an uprising this year. Organised workers are the powerhouse of Egyptian revolution. The spread of strikes, land occupations and the like are signs of the deepening of the revolutionary process. They offer ways for new layers of people to begin organising and expanding their self-confidence.

are often drawn out, giving some breathing space for working people to develop new ideas, new forms of organisation, and new hopes.

As in Tahrir Square in Cairo in February, a popular revolution often begins with a deep sense of unity among the participants. But the unity of the first stage cannot last. In Egypt today, the capitalists, liberals and the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood want the insurgency to end, to go back to “business as usual”. But for the mass of the people, there is still high unemployment, rocketing food prices, poverty wages, and the tyranny of the boss. They have begun to feel their collective power for the first time, but are not sure yet what it could achieve.

Revolutions begin with minorities. In 1917, the population of Petrograd overthrew the Tsar, but most of Russia was not yet directly involved. In Egypt, one estimate is that 25 per cent of the population participated in the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak. That’s a big minority, but still a minority.

Egypt’s revolution began in the bigger cities, but still had to reach out to the smaller towns and to the countryside. A revolutionary situation can widen and deepen as larger layers of the population begin to develop and fight for their own demands.

One vital route is via the expansion of economic demands. The spread of strikes, land occupations and the like are signs of the deepening of the revolutionary process. They offer ways for new layers of people to begin organising and expanding their self-confidence.

The fight to sack corrupt and bullying rulers and local managers can deepen the revolutionary process, raise workers’ confidence – and reduce

that of the bosses. The subtle balance of joy and fear between the classes can alter.

Learning quickly

In a revolutionary situation, learning speed up. Ordinary people learn to judge situations, to measure the weaknesses as well as the strengths of their opponents, and to measure their own collective power in new ways. As part of a mass movement, workers gain a new, self-empowering sense of themselves as possible agents of social transformation and liberation – both collectively and individually. Working people “feel better”. It’s the bosses who worry themselves sick.

To discover whether we are moving toward a social revolution we must ask: are workers developing new institutions from below – factory and neighbourhood committees, independent unions, clubs, associations, assemblies? In short, are new instruments of popular power developing?

Are old differences of status and privilege breaking down, as in the Cairo hospital where doctors, nurses and porters formed a common organisation? This is crucial because, if they start to link together, these organisations can be the foundations of a new kind of state power.

There are no guarantees that a revolutionary situation will end in a successful revolution. Our history is littered with defeats. The question of questions is, can working people establish their own power – or must we retreat once more, only to begin the struggle again?

Colin Barker

read the full version at
socialistworker.co.uk.

